

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Bhakti Yoga Book 2

A WORLD OF EMOTIONS

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Nivaran

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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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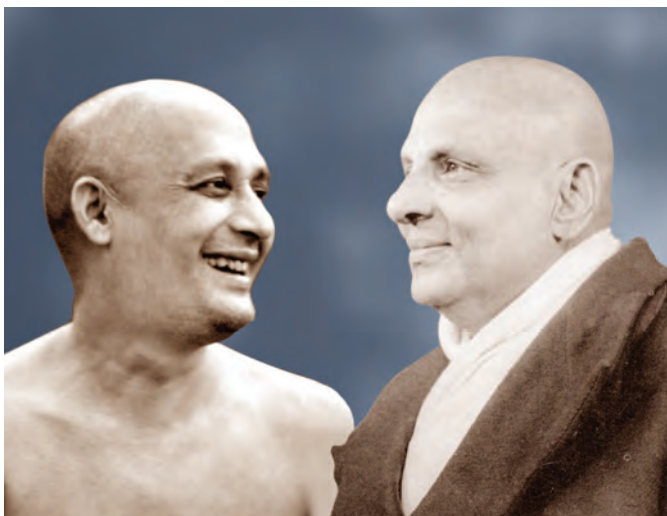
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga vidya has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of

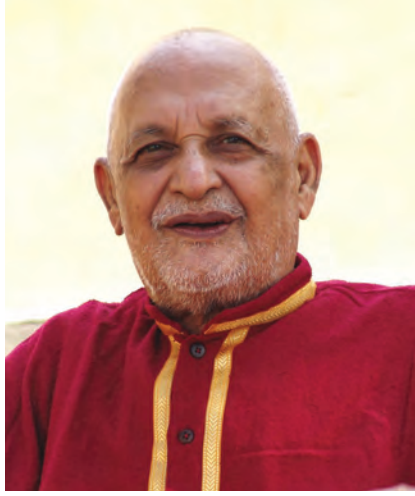


self-realized preceptors which ensures that the yoga vidya remains fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

In 2010, Swami Niranjan established Sannyasa Peeth to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom of yoga vidya.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

In early childhood one learns mastery of the body and senses. Then follows a period of education to develop the mental faculties. What receives less attention and remains under-developed is learning to master one's emotions and open up one's heart. *Bhakti Yoga: A World of Emotions* explores the pure, raw energy of emotion and how it can be directed towards spiritual growth.

Bhakti yoga is a method to help one manage emotions by fine-tuning one's awareness and channelling energies from the mundane to the supreme. The emphasis is on cultivating unconditional love and selfless service, seeing the divine spark in everything and everyone, and recognizing the suffering of others as one's own. Love for the absolute reality or God, in any form or non-form, becomes a vehicle for personal, psychological, intellectual and emotional transformation. Observing the prevalence of mental disturbance, depression, anxiety and stress in our time, Sri Swami Satyananda declared bhakti yoga as the answer to the needs of the 21st century.

Emotion has been compared to a transparent crystal ball that merely reflects the colour of the surface on which it is placed. It will reflect the colour red if placed on a red cloth. In the same manner, the raw energy of emotion is neutral and only takes on colour in contact with an object. When seeing a child, the colour of emotion is affection; when

perceiving a bag of gold, the colour of emotion is greed. Emotion is the colourless crystal, neither good nor bad. It is energy to be used or misused, managed, purified and channelled.

Hatred, envy, passion, love, compassion and empathy are expressions of this raw energy. As Swami Sivananda has said, “You must not become a prey to emotions. You must purify and calm the surging emotions. You must allow them to rise slowly and subside quietly from the mind-ocean.”

The term intelligence quotient (IQ) was coined in 1912 by the German psychologist Wilhelm Stern, who developed a simple scoring test. As interpersonal interactions gained more attention in the study of human behaviour, in the 1920s the term social intelligence quotient (SQ) was born. Finally, in the mid-1980s the term emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) saw the light of day. Since then, research into this raw energy called ‘emotion’ has continued unabated. The well-known relationship between healthy management of emotions and physical and mental wellbeing is being studied anew, with a better understanding of the power that emotion exerts in all dimensions of human experience.

The need to learn strategies and step-by-step techniques, and ultimately to manage one’s emotional potential in a positive and constructive manner, has become the driving force of this young science. Models have sprung up aiming to promote harmony between the individual and fellow human beings. Emotional fulfilment is no longer seen as possible through a frantic search for worldly pleasure and gratification. Instead, the focus is on how to redirect and sublimate the emotions and connect with the peace and contentment inherent in the inner Self.

It is at this point that science has come to intersect with the teachings of bhakti yoga. The aims are the same, though the methods may differ. The disciplines of emotional management as expounded in bhakti yoga offer valuable insight into human behaviour and possibilities for improving the quality and expression of human emotions.

Redirecting emotions

In *Bhakti Yoga: A World of Emotions*, three generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Swami Satyananda Saraswati and Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati – who have experienced the culmination of bhakti yoga, act as guides on a journey for releasing the energy of emotion and converting this energy into an awakened inner experience. Primarily, they emphasize the need to thoroughly cleanse and purify the heart, emotions and entire personality.

Another route they explore, with its own challenges, is subduing the destructive emotions that arise in the heart by consciously evoking opposite, positive feelings – the practice of *pratipaksha bhavana*. “If one really wants to root out hatred and develop pure love, one will have to serve that person whom one’s mind dislikes,” says Swami Sivananda. This has been the dictum of spiritual masters throughout the ages. As Jesus Christ instructed in the Sermon on the Mount: “Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

Bhakti yoga awakens the positive qualities of the heart which enable one to live life in this way. *Bhakti Yoga: A World of Emotions* considers the key emotions in spiritual life: love, devotion and compassion. Of course, these are labels assigned by other seekers, not by bhaktas, for whom bhakti is simply an all-embracing feeling of oneness with creation and its creator. Unshakeable faith and a complete acceptance of pain and suffering are the two wings which take this feeling to ever-higher realms of experience.

Love

Love in bhakti yoga is different from the romantic and family love that is embedded in the collective imagination through social expectations, films, novels and storytelling. In bhakti yoga, the aim is to expand one’s love beyond those considered one’s own. This means expanding the attachment one feels to the close circle of family and friends, and extending it to an ever-growing number of people beyond one’s home,

place and country, eventually to encompass all of humanity. When the barriers are broken the heart expands infinitely. One comes to experience another's suffering as one's own and to derive happiness from the happiness of others.

Often attachment is taken for love, yet it is the opposite. Love frees, while attachment binds. Attachment creates restrictions and limitations, while love elevates the lover and the beloved, be it a partner, child or parent. The testing ground is the day-to-day interactions with one's family and friends, at the work place and in one's community.

Compassion is one expression of love, in which one identifies with the suffering and pain of others and is motivated to alleviate their suffering, without reward. Ultimately, the separation between 'me' and 'you' dissolves completely in the warm light of compassion. Unity and oneness is the outcome. Swami Sivananda says, "Compassion makes us divine."

Devotion

Mundane desires and worldly enjoyments are obstacles to experiencing God. Devotion increases in intensity when these are left aside. At the same time, there is no need to qualify as a renunciate to live a life of devotion. It is when one yearns for the experience of the higher self or God, and realizes the limitations of all other forms of fulfilment in life, that one sets off on the path of devotion. Devotion is an all-consuming force in which the small streams of emotion merge and lose their identity in the strong current of devotion, just as the devotee's identity is merged into the divine. Devotion is constant awareness.

Suffering and sorrow

It often takes a crisis, misfortune, disease or pain to turn the person to spiritual life. Swami Sivananda extols the virtues of adversity, saying, "Adversity develops endurance and willpower, fortitude and forbearance. It melts a stony heart and infuses the aspirant with devotion to God." Suffering

and sorrow are great purifiers. They aid spiritual evolution by turning the awareness from external, worldly things to one's higher self or God.

Pain and suffering are necessary for the evolution of the individual and humankind. Without sickness, the science of medicine never would have developed. By facing sorrow and accepting one's situation in life, sorrow paradoxically can become a source of fulfilment and happiness. Swami Satyananda stated, "Trials and tribulations are but the forms of God's grace. They serve as barometers to indicate the seriousness and grossness of the imperfect personality." To accept the purpose of suffering requires faith that everything happens as it should, and for one's good.

Faith

Faith is a connection to the transcendental self. It is a belief in one's own potential and ability, and the belief that one is being guided and directed. This gives one confidence to walk further down the chosen path. Everyone has faith within, but it needs to be developed. In Swami Niranjanananda's words, "You can believe through your mind. You can disbelieve because of the mind. But once faith arises, that fire, that force, cannot be extinguished by the mind. Faith becomes the strength of human character." The faith that change is possible becomes the basis of spiritual growth.

Every spiritual tradition emphasizes the importance of faith without which no goal can be attained, and asserts that, with faith, everything is possible. Swami Satyananda says, "In the dictionary of faith there is no such word as impossible. If we could maintain innocent faith without any intellectual pollution, there would be nothing in life we couldn't do. Faith is one's greatest and most valuable equipment in life."

Bhaktas

Bhaktas are seekers who have reached the goal. For them the experience of divine bliss is a living reality. Divinity is perceived in everyone and everything. Divinity or the

Supreme can be talked to and praised, implored, touched and washed, adorned and worshipped. The boundary between the mundane and transcendental has dissolved. Their world is infused with universal love.

Bhaktas do not seek union or oneness with the divine. Their blissful experience is based on a relationship of duality. Their joy lies in the connection, ever new, ever more loving, with the *aradhya*, the object of worship. Unlike the jnani, who seeks oneness, merger, unity, the bhakta wants to feel separate, yet connected, apart but filled with love. Bhaktas of all traditions and times have expressed this deep longing: to feel intense intimacy while maintaining the identity of a loving devotee.

For everyone, the world of emotions is a reality. It is a fascinating world full of challenges and adventures. Bhakti yoga helps aspiring bhaktas explore this world and make it beautiful by purifying the emotions until they shine in their positive, pure and uplifting splendour for the benefit of all. Swami Niranjanananda says that, "The whole process of spiritual life is to be open and friendly with all fellow beings; to help, guide, love and live in harmony with each other."



1

Bhakti Yoga and Emotions

Purity of emotion leads to realization of the transcendental nature. Through emotion we access our spirit.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

ALL ABOUT EMOTIONS

Why is it important to understand emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Emotions are powerful and should not be underestimated. They can make one commit suicide, murder someone, become a martyr, a patriot or a saint. They can make one do anything! This emotional personality in man is important and has to be properly understood. For that purpose, there are the practices of bhakti yoga.

What is an emotion?

Swami Sivananda: An emotion is a combination of thought and desire. Every idea is charged with emotion. Emotions are desires which are penetrated by the thought element. In other words, emotion is desire mingled with thought. The vibrations of emotions will arouse corresponding excitement in purely mental matter and all the man's thoughts will be disturbed and distorted.

What is the correct way to deal with destructive emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone has emotions; they are a normal part of the human makeup. But few people can direct and focus these emotions in one direction and towards positive and constructive purposes. Each person is looking for a suitable object or person on which to express and focus their emotions. This occurs either consciously or unconsciously and is the case with both the obviously emotional person and the seemingly unemotional person.

It is in the search for a suitable focal point for emotions and feeling that people rush wildly after so many things in life, and as a result their emotions are needlessly dissipated. Others, who have met with severe and traumatic rebuffs in their efforts to express emotions, tend to suppress them. This is a great problem in life and there is only one positive method of solving it: one must try to focus all the emotions on one thing. The emotions have to be channelled in one direction. Some people do this by directing all their emotions into their work. There is nothing wrong with this, provided the principles of karma yoga are followed as closely as possible. Otherwise, the emotions will rebound and once again cause disturbances.

The best method is to direct all one's emotions towards one subject or object of veneration. One should try and convert emotions into devotion and surrender and dedicate all one's aspirations to the object of devotion. One should offer all the fruits of actions, either spiritually or mentally. This is bhakti yoga, but it is not easy.

How is bhakti yoga defined in terms of emotions?

Swami Niranjanananda: It has been said in the Vedas that just as the seven rivers go towards the ocean and merge in it, when the extroverted tendencies of the mind turn inwards and connect with God, they cease to be; they become part of Paramatma, of bhakti, of Ishwara. Swami Satyananda says that directing the emotions towards God is bhakti yoga. Emotional management means bringing intelligence (head) into the expression (hands) of emotions (heart).

What are the various kinds of emotions?

Swami Sivananda: There is emotion-desire. There is emotion-feeling also. If the desire element is predominant, it is emotion-desire. If the pleasure element is predominant, it is emotion-feeling. *Raga* and *dvesha*, love and hatred, are the two important emotions of the mind and all the different emotions can be classified under these two headings. Wonder is a compound emotion. It is admiration and fear combined. Reverence is a compound emotion. It is awe and respect combined. *Amarsha* is a compound emotion; it is anger, intolerance and jealousy combined. Pleasure is a particular kind of emotion in the mind. The mind expands during pleasure. Coolness prevails in the mind. What takes place in the mind when pleasure-feeling arises is not exactly understood by western psychologists. It is incapable of being understood also by ordinary persons. Only a yogi or a jnani knows this psychic phenomenon. During pain the mind contracts. Considerable heat is produced in the mind. Many of the physical desires and emotions in a person are akin to those of the lower animals. Anger and sex-impulse in an individual are the brutal instincts. In the undeveloped person, these desires and emotions which belong to the lower nature, *aparaprakriti*, predominate and overpower the higher nature, *paraprakriti*.

How does bhakti yoga affect the emotions?

Swami Niranjanananda: Emotions are double-edged swords. E-motion, which is energy in motion, plays a double role. One role is to bind, the other role is to free. Anger can bind and anger can free. Love can bind and love can free. Compassion can bind and compassion can free. Management of emotion is the subject of bhakti yoga.

Bhakti yoga is not the ritualistic devotion that one expresses to God. It is the redirection of feeling, the redirection of an emotion from binding the personality, the consciousness, to releasing the energy.

What triggers emotions to arise?

Swami Niranjanananda: When emotions come in contact with the senses and the sense objects, a colour manifests inside the clear crystal of emotion. When one sees money, the natural feeling to arise is greed. When one sees a small baby, the natural feeling that arises is affection. When one sees somebody who is more successful, the natural feeling that arises is envy or jealousy. When one sees a person one loves, the natural feeling that arises is passion. When one sees a person sick and suffering, the natural feeling that arises is compassion. Whenever one associates or identifies with a sense object, a corresponding emotion arises. These expressions are called emotions.

Are emotions real or imaginary?

Swami Satyananda: There are various forms of emotion: parental, fraternal, maternal and so on, and these emotions need to be fulfilled because they are the basic forms of the human personality. Parents love their children so much. If they don't have children they feel a sort of void in their life. A child feels a void if his mother or father is dead, and this void can be seen in his personality. It is not imagination. That void affects the personality of those who are fatherless or motherless or parentless. Childless parents feel this void. Their behaviour is affected because that particular emotional need has not been fulfilled. A child needs parents. Parents need children. If these two needs are not fulfilled, it affects the mind and the personality.

How is it that emotions can be helpful and also a hindrance?

Swami Sivananda: Emotion is a motive power like the steam of an engine. It helps one in one's evolution. Had it not been for the presence of emotion, one would have passed into a state of passivity or inertia. It gives a push for action or motion. It is a blessing, but one must not become prey to emotions. One must not allow the emotions to rule. One

must not allow them to bubble out. One must purify and calm the surging emotions and allow them to rise slowly and subside quietly from the mind-ocean. One must keep the emotions under perfect control and not mistake physical sensations for higher sublime emotions. One should not be carried away by emotions. There are certain people who like to hear new sensational events just to arouse their emotions. They live on emotions, otherwise they feel quite dull. This is a great weakness. This must be eradicated if they like to have a calm, quiet life.

What is the role of the heart in emotional expressions?

Swami Satyananda: The heart is responsible for all emotional expressions, not the brain. In the heart there are certain centres, as there are centres in the brain. Even if the brain is undeveloped, one can still love. The centres of emotion are in the heart, so the toxins in the heart must be purified.

What are rasas?

Swami Satyananda: Animals too have emotions, but they are limited. A horse has feelings; does he not recognize his master? Of course he does. A cow has feelings. Maybe she does not recognize you, but certainly she recognizes and has feelings for her calf. A dog has warm sentiments towards his beloved master and different feelings for those it dislikes.

The development of *bhavana*, emotion, is necessary to life. All emotions and sentiments are classified as *bhava* in Indian culture. *Bhava* is a *rasa*, the sap of life. There are nine rasas, such as *shringara* rasa, romantic feelings between a girl and boy, and *vibhatsa* rasa, the feeling of disgust and repugnance. These rasas are born of emotions. In other words, the effect of emotions on the human mind is called *rasa*. If there is *vatsalya* rasa, parental emotion in you, then it will give rise to a certain *rasa*, influence, a certain sentiment and a certain kind of action. When there is *shringara* rasa, a certain *rasa* is born. When you are afraid, yet another *rasa* is produced. Modern science has translated these rasas to mean

hormones that are produced at that time. These nine rasas enhance emotional and mental health.

There are various ways of channelling emotions. The channels are paternal, maternal, fraternal, romantic and sexual. However, people to whom the emotion is being given do not always respond properly. Therefore, the emotional response in both parties is inadequate, and an explosion and crisis take place. Emotions are not bad. One should have emotions. If one kills one's emotions, one can't have devotion. Emotions are a very important part of life and should not be killed, but there should be a proper response from both sides.

If either side does not respond properly, there will be a crisis. Respiratory attacks, neurosis or weeping and crying and all kinds of dramas occur. All kinds of explosions take place and in the course of time these explosions become one's personality. It is alright for a few days or a week or month, but if it is the same every day, it will become second nature!

Emotion is a kind of relationship between two individuals. Parents have certain attitudes towards their children; that is called emotion. Children have certain attitudes towards their parents; that is called emotion. Emotion is an expression of the heart, not the brain. Therefore, emotion has no eyes; emotion is blind. Intellect has eyes but it has no heart and that is why there is a crisis and an explosion if the emotions are not responded to properly.

Everybody is searching for emotional fulfilment. A man is trying with his wife or his son or daughter and everywhere he becomes disenchanted. He may love his children for fifteen or twenty years and at some time he becomes disenchanted. Therefore, the emotions have not only to be sublimated but channelled.

How are frequencies and chakras related to emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Every form, every sound, every colour has a certain frequency. All forms, sounds and colours do not have the same frequency. In the same way, every thought has

a frequency. Some are of a low frequency and some are of a high frequency. In order to receive the higher frequencies, the brain must be properly regulated. Here is an example of a high frequency idea:

Once, the great scientist Isaac Newton was sitting in a garden and he watched an apple fall from the tree. We also may have seen apples fall from trees but it doesn't seem strange to us. We have not given any thought to the process. But Isaac Newton had what we could call philosophic attention. This was a quality of his mind and personality and because of it, when an apple fell before him, he discovered the theory of gravity.

Why should one not tell lies? Maybe one thinks there is no harm in telling lies if one can make money, rule a nation or suppress people. The whole thing is contingent upon the frequency of consciousness. At a lower frequency of consciousness one will say there is no harm in telling lies, but when the frequency is raised the mind operates at a different level and one cannot really accept it. Many people say, "Why should we not kill? After all, when we kill an animal we may be liberating it and enabling it to a better birth quicker." Such an attitude and way of thinking is the result of the quality of the mind and the particular frequency at which it functions.

Once, Buddha went hunting with his cousin Devadatta. Devadatta shot an arrow at a pigeon and it fell down, injured by the arrow. Buddha felt the pain of that bird and immediately rushed to remove the arrow, but Devadatta did not feel the pigeon's pain. He was pleased that he had struck his target. Buddha's consciousness had attained a higher frequency vibration and as a result of that he was sensitive to the pigeon's pain and manifested compassion.

Therefore, the higher qualities of a man, such as love, compassion, charity and mercy, are the expressions of a mind which is influenced by awakened chakras. This is precisely the reason why so much importance is given to the awakening of anahata chakra. Of course, every other chakra

is also important and the awakening of other chakras confers certain abilities, but you will find that the scriptural texts emphasize the awakening of anahata chakra, mooladhara chakra and ajna chakra. Yogis emphasize ajna chakra and mooladhara chakra, and humankind emphasizes anahata chakra. When anahata is awakened one has a sublime relationship with God, with family members and with every being.

Why is it necessary to express emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Everybody has seen a mango or an apple falling from a tree. Throw anything up in the air and it falls down. This has been happening for thousands of years and thousands of people have seen it, however, only Newton realized the reason why this happens. His brain was so developed that he was able to see the falling apple with concentrated, one-pointed attention. Many things happen around us, but we do not notice them or pay attention to them. Why does smoke rise upwards? Why does water fall downwards? This attentiveness is called philosophical insight. Newton had an insight into gravity. Similarly, there was a scientist who once had a fever when he was travelling, and he rested by a well nearby. He was thirsty, so he drank from the well and then slept under the shade of a tree. When he awoke, he was bathed in sweat and the fever had broken. In this way, quinine was discovered. There was a Cinchona tree by the well and its leaves were falling into the well. The quinine in them affected the water and it was as if he took medicine when he drank the water. The quinine caused him to sweat as he slept and to break the malarial fever. We do not have such insights. To acquire this quality, emotions must be expressed and not repressed.

What is the reason that people are not progressing in India today? Why are people in South-East Asia not progressing? Why is it that only the Europeans progressed? Why did they progress so much scientifically? With the help of minimal resources, how did they make so many bombs

and satellites? What principle did they discover so that without using any wires someone who is dancing in Delhi can be seen in Deoghar? You can be certain that the men who discovered this must have had no repressed emotions.

Whatever the emotions are, they must be expressed. There are many emotions such as fear, maternal love, romance, revulsion and affection. Every time one sees something it evokes an emotion. There is an emotional reaction. An emotional reaction must be expressed. It is only after doing this that Europe progressed. In other ways, theirs was also a repressive society. There are many prohibitions in Christianity. When society broke free from the shackles of religion and society, many emotions were expressed. They came out into the open, and then society produced many great scientists. Today they are criticized for starting wars so they can sell their arms and tanks to become rich; nevertheless, one has to acknowledge their achievements.

What are examples of achievements born of emotions freely expressed?

Swami Satyananda: There were two decisive moments in the development of man: first, when man learnt the use of fire and next, when man discovered electricity. In both cases, human civilization took a quantum leap. Today everything depends on electricity. The world today is the outcome of that decisive leap. The man who discovered all this, who connected chemistry and electricity, must have been a terrific man. He put chemicals into a box, made a battery and produced electricity. The battery was then put into a box and a button attached to it and then, lo and behold, there was a torch. This is an achievement. Electricity marked a historical change for mankind.

Electricity transformed the whole world, but the biggest discovery yet has been remote control. You press a button here which starts a machine on Mars, which can then be controlled from earth and made to move to the left and to the right. Press a switch here and a program from Delhi is

uploaded to a satellite, from where it feeds into your satellite dish, and from the dish it is transmitted to your television. These are certainly the achievements of people who were completely free to express all their emotions.

Kalidasa was a great scholar of Sanskrit. Read the *Raghuvansham* by Kalidasa, or *Kumarasambhavam* and *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*. It is wonderful poetry. Kalidasa has a standing in Sanskrit, just as Tulsidas has in Hindi. However, he died in a prostitute's house. He used to go there a lot. The point is that man progresses and grows through his emotional personality.

After all, what is bhakti? Bhakti is also an emotion. It was through the feelings of devotion that you conceived of God. If there had been no devotion in you, then it would not matter to you whether there was a God or not. If not for the feeling of fear, a snake and a necklace would be the same to you as it is to a baby. Discrimination is born of emotion. This is how one recognizes and differentiates. It is because of emotion that you make the distinction whether or not there is a God, and you try to understand the mystery. This is a play of nature, a game played by maya.

What is the real form of the human mind and human emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Artists all over the world have tried to express the form of emotion through their art. How can fear, love, hatred or ecstasy be represented so that someone else can actually experience it? Do these things have form or are they formless? They do have a form, but they are not conceivable as such. Symbols have to be drawn for them, and it is only through those symbols that one comes to understand what fear, love, hatred and so on are all about.

How should one understand the role of emotions in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga has a specific purpose and reason for cultivating the qualities of the heart. It is not to experience love, not to experience sympathy, compassion

and goodness, but to manage the emotions so that they can help transform life. Just as the intellect is the outcome of the mind function, emotion is the outcome of the heart function.

Emotions are pure, yet become coloured when interacting with the sense organs or sense objects, or with ideas and beliefs. Depending on the association of the emotion, a particular type of response is experienced. The only outlet for these emotions to express themselves is through the senses. Emotions are associated with sensory experiences. A beautiful rose and the visual association create an emotional response of attraction, but a pile of rubbish lying on the road creates an emotional response of rejection. Attraction and repulsion are the sensorial responses of the emotion. When one desires beauty or happiness, one is attracted to those things which bring out that response from within.

The heart is like a crystal ball: clear, pure and transparent. If the crystal ball is placed on a red cloth, one will see the colour red reflected in it, yet that does not mean that the ball is red. If the crystal ball is placed on a green cloth, the green colour will be reflected in it, yet that does not mean that the ball is green. Depending on their proximity, the different colours can be seen in a crystal ball. In the same manner, emotions are evoked when they are in close proximity to an object or idea. They are energies which begin to move and over which there is no voluntary control. These emotions are not understood, but people identify certain feelings that they enjoy and which they think will fulfil them. There are certain emotions that have come to be accepted universally as good, such as love, compassion, sympathy, friendship, and people aspire to acquire them, but how?

The way to awaken the positive qualities of the heart is to divert the emotions. The concept of heart in yoga refers to two hearts: one which is physical and the other which is subtle. The physical heart is responsible for the maintenance of the physical body and the subtle heart is responsible for the management of life. Yoga looks at the expressions of the heart from this perspective.

When the term heart is used in yoga, the reference is not to the physical organ, but the subtle one which contains the emotions, both positive and negative. Here the emotions are in their raw form. What goes to the level of mahat – ahamkara, buddhi, chitta and manas – is modified emotion. The emotion has already been trimmed and designed to fit in the specific area of the mind where thoughts, feelings and desires manifest. When generated at the heart level, prior to reflecting in the mind and changing its mood, the emotion is pure, raw energy. The strength of that energy is such that it can carry one with it and make one forget everything else except what that energy is focused on. Anger, infatuation, envy and jealousy are all expressions of this raw energy. Of course, the mind and the heart are not separate functions in terms of emotion, but yoga perceives them as separate entities. The heart has a greater role to play in the life of an individual, in redirecting and re-channelling the outward flowing emotions towards the inner self.

When it connects with the external environment, the heart evokes certain responses based on the contact or association with a sense object. Sri Swami Satyananda says that emotions are totally pure. They are pure energies, untainted by material or personal aspirations and ambitions. In their raw form they are like a crystal ball, totally colourless, transparent and clear. The crystal ball in itself has no colour. It absorbs the colour of whatever object it is placed upon. The same applies to human emotions. They are colourless, but take on a colour when associating with an event, idea or object. That colour influences the mental behaviour.

What happens to emotions at the time of death?

Swami Satyananda: Emotion, *bhavana*, is the background to an action. Emotions have no connection with rebirth. Emotion is the reaction to human life – to a person, to a thought, towards a beautiful object, towards birth or death, to husband or wife, to a woman, a man, a son, a friend or enemy. This reaction in

the mind is called an emotion. This emotion is limited to this life. Emotions do not have a rebirth. Emotions are grafted on to human life. They are the gift of the circumstances of home, family and society. They are not a gift of nature. This means that emotions will be with each individual until death, and not after.

According to vedic tradition, what are the three duties of a human being?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the spiritual traditions of India there is a concept that human beings are *manushi*. *Manushi* means sentient beings, people who can think, people who can rationalize, people who can analyze, people who can discriminate, people who can decide, people who can do the right thing, people who can know the difference between right and wrong. This is the quality and the nature of sentient beings who have been given three duties. The first duty is to know how to use the senses properly, control and manage them. The second duty is to develop the mind, and the third duty is to develop the heart. These are the only three duties or aims of human beings, as given in the vedic tradition. Attaining mastery over the faculties of senses, mind and emotions is the purpose of *manushi*, or sentient beings.

When people are born they learn how to use their senses. They learn how to walk, to crawl, to pick up things, to use their hands. They learn about hearing, sight, smell, taste from childhood on and, ultimately, when they grow up they gain mastery over the body and senses. They can use them in the most appropriate manner, which is mastery of senses. If there is no mastery of senses, people are considered mentally or physically challenged.

The second aspect is the cultivation of mind. Education has become the medium through which one can educate oneself. In the ancient *gurukul* system of education, education was material as well as spiritual. Sixty-four creative arts or *kalas* were taught to students. Out of the

sixty-four creative arts taught to *vidyarthi*, students, in the ashram, many used to be social professions and skills, others used to be spiritual disciplines. The concept of mental education in India was material and spiritual. A period of twelve years was decided, to educate oneself in the skills related to life and acquire the wisdom necessary to interact in life. It was a twelve-year study period for realizing the mind.

The third aspect relates to the emotions, the opening up of the heart. After fulfilling the first two levels people are totally blocked, insensitive, inconsiderate, self-oriented and selfish. Needs and greed are highlighted in people's lives. There is no opening of the heart, and as *manushi* the third stage has to be mastered. It will happen over a period of time. Swami Satyananda proclaimed that the twenty-first century would be the century of emotions, when people will explore, experiment and redirect their emotions, and cultivate them creatively as they have done with the mind. Spiritual traditions help one realize the *manushi* aspect. The debauch and the saint realize the *manushi* aspect. Both sinner and saint work to attain perfection in the *manushi* aspect.

When these three conditions of life are fulfilled, one transcends the earthly body and moves to higher dimensions of existence and experience. They are defined in the spiritual traditions as *lokas*. *Lokas* are dimensions where another mind-set, another emotion-set is lived, with more wisdom, luminosity, clarity, discrimination, and with right understanding and approach to living. The purpose as defined for human life in the vedic tradition is the mastery over those aspects of existence in this life: body, mind and emotions. As long as there is imbalance in the physical, mental and emotional structure, the cycle of rebirth will continue. If there is harmony and proper growth in these three aspects, one simply keeps on progressing and evolving.

BHAVANA

What is bhavana?

Swami Satyananda: This transcendental quality is a special intensity of awareness in human beings. It is neutral in the absence of a particular form. It assumes a form according to the way it is directed. For example, electricity conducted through a microphone becomes sound; through a bulb it becomes light; through a refrigerator it becomes cold; through a heater it becomes heat. In the same way, that particular awareness or feeling, whether it is called bhavana or chetana, whatever name it is given, whichever way it is directed, is known as *bhakti*, devotion to the higher reality of life, *anurakti*, the state of being attached, *virakti*, the state of being detached, *asakti*, attachment, and so on.

Bhakti is a feeling. It has nothing to do with pooja or religious ceremonies. That is all ritual, physical actions, but that is not the definition of bhakti. Priests perform pooja in temples, but is their heart, their feeling, their bhavana in it? No. A mother sitting at home is always aware of her children who are outside. She has the feeling that she is cooking for them and they will like it in a certain way. This remembrance is constantly at the back of her mind. One has to have the same attitude towards God while performing all one's worldly duties. A poet says:

Love depends on fidelity, not rules.

Bowing the head is not prayer.

How is bhavana expressed in the personality of Sri Rama?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the *Ramacharitamanas* it is said that, at the time of the marriage of Sita and Rama, when the bow was broken Parashurama became furious. Lakshman was the first person to deal with the situation. Lakshman stood up and said, "How dare you say that to Rama?" Sri Rama remained equipoised and simply bowed his head. Much later somebody asked, "How come there is such a

difference between the behaviour and attitude of Sri Rama and Lakshman?” Hanuman gave a beautiful answer, saying, “Lakshman is like a rock, the flag pole, upright and straight, hard and strong. Sri Rama is like the flag. It goes with the wind, wherever the wind goes, there Rama goes. There is no stiffness in Rama.”

Similarly, the sensitivity which one develops in bhavana makes one more humble and an example of love. There is no feeling that I have attained so much and done so much. Therefore, bhavana is not a feeling but creative contemplation. In the state of creativity and creative contemplation, one becomes a witness to the direction and force of the mind. Whether there is a strong wind flowing or a gentle breeze makes no difference to the flag. It simply has to move according to the strength of the wind without confronting that strength.

Can it be said that bhavana arises from the soul?

Swami Satyananda: Emotion does not exist within the confines of reason. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the intellect is above the senses and the *atma*, or soul, resides above the intellect. The soul and the feelings are one and the same. People have feelings for their children; they see themselves in the child. What does soul mean? Soul means the self. The *atma*, the self, and the feelings are the same. It may be called bhavana or it may be called *atma*, self or spirit. Music affects the feelings, the *atma*, and it is a powerful tool. Therefore, along with yoga one should add music, kirtan.

Bhavana is feeling and it definitely exists, because when people are angry they hate. They feel like killing that person and due to this feeling they cannot sleep at night. The feeling of anger disturbs the heart and blood pressure. When there is enmity towards someone, they lose their appetite. The liver also functions improperly. In many people worries and anxieties cause the eyesight to become weak. This means that the effect of bhavana or feeling on the human body is tangible.

How does bhavana differ from a sentiment?

Swami Satyananda: Prayer, whether it is asking for something or communicating with the inner self, is not conducted through the medium of the mind. It is purely an expression of one's inner feelings. I am not talking about sentiments, and I don't know if the word 'feeling' can convey what I mean to express. In bhakti it is called *bhavana*, which means the expression of one's inner being. The expression of one's inner being is called devotion. The expression of the mind, emotions or passions is called sentiment.

How are feelings developed?

Swami Satyananda: It is an attitude of the heart. Every individual has various attitudes in him which are fully matured. One does not have to learn how to develop the heart. Every human being, whether a saint or an ordinary person, a child, a young lady, an old man or even an infant of two years, has a fully developed heart because they can feel love, pain, animosity and hatred. Feelings do not have to be developed; they are natural for every living being, not only human beings. Trees and animals have feelings. It is the natural tendency of every living being to react; chemicals react. This reaction to each other is an outcome of feeling. God has to be felt just as a mother's love or a friend's love is felt.

How can one connect with bhavana in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Human beings are extroverted by nature, identifying with the senses and the external environment. They have been looking out so much that they have forgotten to look within. They have lost touch, lost awareness, lost the quality of observation that can help them find equanimity between the gross self and the subtle self. Their experience of the interaction between the heart and the head is always just a reaction. They react and believe that reaction is an expression of emotion. But yoga says no! The yogic term for emotions is *bhavana*, which is different from

passion, *kamana*, and mental obsession, *vasana*. In bhavana there is harmony between the head and the heart.

In order to awaken the bhavana, the real emotion, the first condition is that one has to stop reacting. When one reacts, the intellect becomes clouded. The discriminative ability, *viveka*, no longer exists, and personal peace is lost. Even in love there is a conditioned expression of mind as there is always an expectation, there is always passion and desire, and these are also reactions. Yoga says to stop reacting. However, this does not mean that one isolates oneself from what is happening. Yoga says to be involved, yet without reacting. It is an involvement that is flowing, and therefore one does not experience struggle, for flow is passive and struggle is reaction. This is the stage one has to come to in order to experience harmony between the gross and the subtle nature.

Why does one need to focus on bhavana in vanaprastha ashrama?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the third stage of life, *vanaprastha ashrama*, the aim and the direction is to cultivate sattwic emotions. This is important. The rishis defined the process of growth cleverly: the first ashrama is for the intellect, *buddhi pradhan*; the second ashrama for action, *karma pradhan*; and the third ashrama for emotion, *bhava pradhan*.

Emotions represent a type of energy and power which can make one internalize quickly. Emotions are the gateways to the psychic dimensions of life. They are the gateways by which one can bring forth the positive and sattwic dimensions of life. Emotions are continuously churning in the brahmacharya ashrama and grihastha ashrama. The churning of emotion is happening and nobody even bothers to look at them. People only look at their emotions from the perspective of ambition, hatred, envy, greed, love, compassion. For people emotion means only that. These are expressed emotions which have a name. However, the unexpressed emotion, the source of emotion, is a source of

energy which when tapped can lead to an awakened internal experience.

These emotions which have been churning through the brahmacharya ashrama and grihastha ashrama have to be pacified. The sufferings that one has faced in life, the scars which one has had in life, the happiness, the fulfilment and the depression one has experienced in life, the joy, the tension and frustration one has experienced in life, have left their mark on one's emotions. Emotions define a state of anxiety and tension in life, where one identifies with that which binds and makes one identify with the external objects and situations.

In Sanskrit these emotions are called bhavas. *Bhavas* means a condition of mind which is non-intellectual, where only purity remains. To experience and obtain the purity of emotion is difficult, for the impressions from the previous ashramas have to be reformed in the vanaprastha ashrama.

When one is involved in the material life, the mind is like a passport. Wherever one goes, the impressions are like stamps in the passport in the form of memories: a good memory, a bad memory, a pleasant memory, a fulfilling memory, a satisfying memory, a memory of aversion, a memory of neglect. Everything comes in the form of memories. Memory is like the stamp on the passport, it remains with one all the time. One still carries the memory of an abuse or insult after ten years.

These memory imprints in the brahmacharya and grihastha ashrama have to be changed. In the vanaprastha ashrama the attempt is for *shuddhi*, for the purification of emotions, for appropriate behaviour and expression of one's nature.

How is inner awareness redirected?

Swami Satyananda: Bhavana does not demand concentration as in trataka. It is a simple matter. A mother cooking food for her child in the kitchen does not utter the child's name all the time. She is aware that her son or daughter will come

home and she has toast or a sandwich or spaghetti ready for them. This is *bhavana*, or feeling which is part of the inner consciousness; this is the purpose of inner awareness. Of course, this is not denying the efficacy of *trataka* or any other practice, but *bhakti* is more than that. It is a constant awareness, a process of thinking.

Bhakti is always there. Everyone has feeling. Without feeling one would not love or hate. The feeling which goes towards God is the same feeling which goes towards one's enemy whom one hates. It is the same feeling one has when afraid or in pain, or which is expressed when in love. The basic stuff is the same, only the target is different – enemy, beloved or God.

Yoga is easy but *bhakti* is not because it is related to inner personal feelings, not the mind. *Bhakti* has nothing to do with mind or intellect. *Bhakti* is concerned with the heart and feeling. To direct this feeling to God is a big job, not an ordinary job. Therefore, one has to start by directing the feeling towards the form of God that one loves.

How does intensity of feeling relate to bhavana?

Swami Satyananda: Anyone who has ever loved someone in this world or hated someone intensely will understand what *bhavana* means. It is a feeling which is extremely strong, so strong that one is constantly aware of it. It cannot be forgotten no matter how much one tries. It is like an obsession which cannot be got rid of. The feeling of love for Him need not always be like that between lovers. It can be the feeling of intense hatred as for an enemy, a hatred that overpowers the mind and keeps coming up whether one is asleep or awake.

The relationship with God can also consist of the feelings of disgust, malice or jealousy. These are feelings, just as love and affection are. The relationship with God may revolve around any one of these intense feelings, the one that one's mentality and personality can accept. It is possible that one mentality may be different from another. I accept myself as a

servant of God, and I function in life with this viewpoint. It is possible that this may be totally incomprehensible to another person.

How does this intensity of awareness express itself?

Swami Satyananda: When a person feels anxious and worried, he thinks about the same difficulty all the time. Even while eating the mind suddenly reverts to it. Why? Because some trauma or calamity has been experienced, and that feeling comes back again and again, so there is the awareness of that feeling. This awareness is in everyone, in the whole of creation, in all humankind, in all animals. Feelings do not have to be produced; everyone experiences them to the fullest degree. This can be seen in family members when they fight. When the eldest son dies, the parents never sit down calmly and say, “Well, our son is dead, now what should we do?” They start crying, breaking their heads and doing all kinds of things. Bhavana is fully developed in every being; it does not have to be developed. That is why people hate and why people love.

Bhakti is the ultimate point of fusion, when one splits the atom and explodes the nucleus. The ultimate point is bhakti, devotion, love. Bhakti is not religious devotion where one goes to a temple or a church, says prayers, offers flowers and does pooja. Real devotion has to come from the heart. Bhakti is an expression of bhavana, feeling from the heart; it is not a product of intellect.

The intellect is discerning, but bhavana is blind. A girl falls in love with a boy. She thinks he is the only fellow of worth, the most comely young man, the ideal lover, as if there are no other boys in the world. Bhavana here is a limited concept. The feeling creates a limit and immediately a circle is drawn around it. The girl thinks that he is the most handsome boy, as if no other exists. Similarly, the boy thinks that she is the most beautiful girl, even though God has produced millions of attractive women. Bhavana is inward, not outward. Because a circle is drawn, it limits the flow of

thoughts and feelings to the object of emotion; it intensifies and unites the feeling.

What does one do with these intense, narrow feelings?

Swami Satyananda: The bhavana has to be streamlined. Instead of directing it towards fear, anger, animosity, hatred, *maya*, illusive power, and *moha*, delusion, it has to be directed towards God. When one can love Him as one would love a boyfriend or girlfriend, then God will be there; He will come immediately. Tulsidas says in the *Ramacharitamanas*, Balakanda (after so 184, chau 2–4):

*Jaake hridaya bhagati jasi preetee,
Prabhu taha pragata sadaa tehi reetee. . .
Hari byaapaka sarbatra samaanaa,
Prema te pragata hohi mai jaanaa.
Desa kaala disi bidisihu maahee,
Kahahu so kahaa jahaa prabhu naahee.
Aga jagamaya saba rahita biraagee,
Prema te prabhu pragatai jimi aagee. . .*

In whose heart there is love of Divine nature
There the Lord manifests, as it is His nature. . .
God pervades everywhere alike.
It is known that He manifests out of love.
Tell me the place, time or direction
Where there is absence of the Lord.
He pervades the ones with and without money
And yet He is apart and without attachment.
God manifests himself out of love
As fire manifests out of friction. . . (2–4)

The last pronouncement in the *Ramacharitamanas* is the most beautiful and correct pronouncement: “Even as a lustful man loves a woman or a miserly man loves money, may I love God.” There is nothing beyond that. One cannot realize anything unless one is mad for it.

Why is madness or mania not necessarily negative?

Swami Satyananda: If I suffer from Rama psychosis or Krishna neurosis, well and good. What is the use of suffering from fear psychosis or neurosis, or from sex mania? It is better to have a good mania so that something positive comes from it.

Paramahansa Ramakrishna was known in Bengal as a mad man. Now thousands worship him as a God, but when he lived many people such as Keshav Chandra Sen, the famous freedom fighter, called him a maniac. Ramakrishna used to say, “It’s all right if you call me a fool. I accept it if you say I am mad.” The madness should be like this. In order to realize something which has never been seen, the emotions must be directed totally in the right direction. That is bhakti.

What about vacillation in bhavana?

Swami Satyananda: Waxing and waning also happens naturally on the path of bhakti. Waxing and waning has to happen because it is an indicator of the expansion or progression of bhavana, feeling. Everyone experiences waxing and waning of material and mundane feelings because the feelings are not stable. When the mind is unstable it experiences ups and downs. Similarly, when feelings are unstable they have their ups and downs.

To prevent these ups and downs, one must constantly listen to satsang. Satsang is a tool by which one can recharge one’s battery with bhavana the moment it is even slightly discharged. Thereby the bhavana will be steady and constant. Eventually one will be fixed in that state, which is of a high order, but right now the ups and downs are inevitable. The waxing and waning of spiritual consciousness is as natural as the waxing and waning of normal consciousness in human beings.

When does one achieve constancy of bhavana?

Swami Satyananda: When a person hates someone, he thinks about him day and night. When someone dear dies, he remembers him all the time. The memory haunts him

and he cannot forget it, even if he wants to. That feeling is bhavana, which is the chief ingredient, the basic cause of love. Again it has been said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 55):

Tatpraapya tadevaavalokayati tadeva shrinoti tadeva bhaashayati tadeva chintayati.

After attaining bhakti of God, the devotee sees only his object of devotion, hears only about Him, speaks only about Him and thinks only of Him.

The problem is that the feelings are confused, preoccupied with the tangles of the world. Therefore one's bhavana is not free. It has to be freed one way or another. Sometimes something happens in life which frees the bhavana for a while, say five to six months, but bhavana should be constantly free. When a young man and woman fall in love with each other, like Laila and Majnu or Romeo and Juliet, their bhavana withdraws from all other avenues and becomes concentrated in the partner. Laila could only see Majnu and Majnu could only see Laila, nothing else.

This is oneness of bhavana. Hanuman's awareness was constantly focused on Sri Rama. It is like the way one looks after the family's needs every day. Some part of the parents is thinking about the children even though they do not repeat their names all the time. A servant has a similar attitude towards his master, a son has a similar attitude towards his parents.

How can one learn to focus awareness on God alone?

Swami Satyananda: One has to look for the most intense relationship that can be felt with God so that the bhavana may merge quickly with Him. What is an intense relationship? It will not do to say that God is one's father-in-law. What relationship does one have with a father-in-law? He is not the true father; he is a father by law. Similarly, the mother-in-law is one's mother only by law. It will not do to

say that God is one's father-in-law, mother-in-law, uncle or nephew.

Look for that relationship with God in which the feelings will stick firmly to Him. Find out what is most special about one's attitude towards Him. My bhavana is that of a servant, because for twelve years I was the servant of my guru and then for twelve years I was the servant of my disciples. I have become used to being a servant.

By what methods does one develop bhavana?

Swami Satyananda: First find out what one's inner nature is, then what one's bhavana is, then what the manifest form of that bhavana is. Some people have affection, some romantic love, some gentleness, some enmity. One's relationship with God may revolve around any intense feeling that one's mentality and personality can accept. Find the relationship with God according to the inner feeling. Think that whatever one is doing is serving God. This is what one's bhavana should be. God is everywhere. Keep reflecting on God. Always sing God's name.

In what way is intellect a barrier to experiencing bhavana?

Swami Niranjanananda: Intellect has to be transcended and it has to be purified, as simple as that. Sri Aurobindo said, "In the beginning intellect was my friend, now intellect is a barrier. Transcend it." This statement applies to all. Initially, intellect is used as an attempt to understand something which is incomprehensible to the mind. There comes a time when this attempt to understand something creates a block in the natural, spontaneous and innocent expression of the self. People begin to falter, their intellect becomes a barrier, and at that point they have to let go of the intellect.

The heart is not the organ inside the ribcage ticking away from the moment of birth to the moment of death. The heart is a faculty, just as intellect is the faculty of the *antahkarana*. Heart is only a word which means the physical organ, yet the expression of that physical organ has not been

defined in English. In Sanskrit it is defined as *bhava*, feeling, sentiment, expression of innocence and simplicity. It is an expression which is not guided by intellect or the mind but is natural and spontaneous. This attribute or faculty of heart is actually at present guided by the mind. The mind says, 'This person is nice,' so the heart says, 'I accept what you are saying,' and an empathy, a connection develops. A few moments later there is a struggle and the mind says, 'This person is not as nice as I thought earlier,' and the heart says, 'Fine.' There is headache and heartache. It is not the heart which is guiding the mind; it is the mind which is guiding the heart. The intellect is guiding the bhavana. As long as intellect is guiding bhavana, one faces emotional and psychological struggles and conflicts. This is what makes the heart faculty tainted and impure. Intellect covers the luminosity of the feeling of heart and gives it a colour.

In bhakti, the heart's feeling may be there but the mind intervenes. Instead of feeling that joy at having seen God or guru and experiencing that connection, the mind intervenes and says, 'Ask God when I will be free from my troubles. When will suffering go away from my life?' What is the use of seeing God if one is not able to focus on the experience, and instead directs one's entire focus on suffering? When one has the ultimate of life in front of one, one is still worried about suffering.

One has to use common sense and learn to differentiate and discriminate between the appropriate and the inappropriate. When one is able to do that, one will become a yogi who knows the difference between heart and mind.

What are the three categories of vrittis in the treatises on bhakti and how can the understanding of these help an aspirant?

Swami Niranjanananda: The *Brahmasutra Bhashya* says: *Manastvekamaneke vrittikam* – "This mind has numerous vrittis." In the treatises on bhakti these vrittis are divided into three categories: jnana vritti, bhavana vritti and karma

vritti. There is a mutual relationship among them – one vritti is usually dominant, and the other two cooperate with and support that dominant vritti. For example, when *jnana* or knowledge is the dominant vritti, there is still an input of *bhavana*, emotion, and *karma*, action. When one is listening to a satsang on the subject of bhakti, the *jnana* vritti is predominant. What one hears evokes an emotion, and then the *bhavana* vritti comes into play. If one subsequently acts according to what one heard, the *karma* vritti is engaged. The *jnana* vritti is predominant, yet the vrittis of *bhavana* and *karma* are supporting it.

Another example is a player running with a football. While he is running the *karma* vritti is dominant. Along with the *karma* vritti, the *jnana* vritti is present as the player knows the position of the goal. He must overcome the obstacles he meets along the way as he moves towards the post to score a goal. Here, *karma* vritti is being supported by *jnana* vritti. Through the vritti of *jnana*, the *karma* vritti is given an aim. When the player scores a goal his *bhavana* vritti is awakened. He is elated that he has scored a goal and won a point. Whether one listens to satsang or plays football, one vritti will be predominant and the other two vrittis will support it.

In the texts on bhakti, the *bhavana* vritti is given prominence. It is said in the *Ramacharitamanas*: *Jaki rahi bhavana jaisi prabhu moorat tin dekhi taisi* – “As is one’s emotion, so is one’s capacity to see the form of God.” When there is an intense experience of the *bhavana* vritti, the body may tremble, the hair may stand on end and one may get goose bumps. These are the physical expressions of the *bhavana* vritti. When the heart is stirred by emotion, tears flow from the eyes, which is the *kriya* vritti or action form of the *bhavana* vritti. The *bhavana* vritti is full of *rasa*, which roughly means sweet essence. By experiencing the *rasa* of the *bhavana* vritti a person becomes loving and devoted. If there is not enough *rasa* in the *bhavana* vritti then the feeling of bhakti will not awaken, and devotion, love, empathy and sensitivity will not

grow. Thus, the bhavana vritti has a nourishing aspect. It spontaneously produces the qualities of love, faith and trust.

Another aspect of the bhavana vritti is passion, where one is overcome by a surge of energy. This energy sometimes takes the form of fear, sometimes anger, depression, introversion or extroversion. In fits of passion a person may behave like a madman. There is a need for balance in bhakti, since it is not the aim of bhakti to become overcome by passion or to develop attachment. The aim of bhakti is to become one with the fountain of *ananda*, bliss. For the attainment of this aim the *brahmi vritti*, the spiritual vritti, must be born.

TRANSFORMING EMOTIONS

How can one change one's hardened heart?

Swami Sivananda: People have hard hearts, harder than granite, harder than a diamond, because of wrong actions done life after life. The heart should melt, only then can one find self-realization. There is no shortcut to self-realization. A person without mercy, love and humility cannot realize the Self. This must be understood clearly. These words must be engraved on one's heart, written in bold letters on placards and placed in one's rooms and office. God cannot manifest in a sin-hardened heart. The heart must melt like butter before He can reveal Himself.

This melting is done by kirtan and untiring selfless service rendered with the feeling that all are forms of Narayana. One will develop a feeling of oneness with all. Listening to scriptures and contemplation will be of no avail if there is no purification of the heart. Vedantic sadhana at this immature stage will only fatten egoism and harden it.

Apply this acid test: does your heart melt at the suffering of others? Have charity and generosity become your very nature? Your money belongs to God. You have no business to keep more than you need. How can you accumulate wealth when your God in the form of the poor man is starving? How

can you take food four times when the beggar Narayana is starving outside the door? These are the tests of spiritual progress.

How does the transformation of emotions start?

Swami Satyananda: Only when the emotions are trained in the right direction can they be transformed and converted into bhakti, otherwise most people are totally dissipated. They do not know which way to drive the car. They have a chariot with four horses – one horse goes to the right, another to the left, the third one pulls up and the fourth will not move. Now which way will the chariot go? The untrained senses, mind and emotions all have to be channelled properly.

Can bhakti be seen as the reverse of chitta vritti?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti yoga is a process in which the emotions are involved and the awareness is directed and dedicated to a higher being. This higher being may be the ishta devata, guru, a saint, the Self, or formless time and space. Whenever the tendencies and the mind are directed towards the subtle spheres of existence and are completely dedicated towards that, it is known as bhakti. When the same tendencies flow to the outside through the senses, *indriyas*, either to positive or negative aspects, *shuddha* or *ashuddha*, that is known as *chitta vritti*, modifications of the self. When a person is cruel, unkind, hateful and dedicated to harming others, that is a negative form of love. Love means ‘total awareness’.

How can sexual energy be diverted in bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Energy has different manifestations at different levels. Matter is the grossest manifestation of energy. Matter in the ultimate state is energy; energy in the grossest manifestation is matter. Therefore, energy and matter are interconvertible. A thought is an object; an object is a thought. This body is consciousness and the consciousness has become this body.

Sexual awareness has to be reanalyzed, redefined and put in its correct place. The same energy flows through passion. When channelled, the same energy flows through devotion. When channelled, the same energy flows through spiritual experience. Therefore, one can have different attitudes in one's life. One loves God. He can be pictured as one's father, mother, friend or husband. These are the ways by which one is sublimating the forms of one's emotional energy.

Why do emotions need to be channelled and sublimated?

Swami Satyananda: Emotions, when they are sublimated and channelled, are known as bhakti – devotional attitudes. Emotions, when directed to passion, to the objects of the senses, are worldly relationships. It is through the path of bhakti, through the path of devotion to the ishta devata, to the guru, that the emotions are channelled.

Channelling the emotions is necessary, otherwise when these emotions are converted into passions, desires and so on, they kick the mind this way and that and the mind becomes exhausted. Once the mind is caught up in this net, it can never become free. The maya, the illusion caused by the mind, makes devotion flow through gross channels. Hating someone makes the emotions gross. Therefore, in the path of yoga, first the guru comes as a medium of sublimation and channelling the emotions.

Why is it not enough to channel surplus emotions to family and friends?

Swami Satyananda: Surplus emotions are the cause of all agonies, frustrations, breakdowns and suicides. How much love can one give one's children and family? There is nothing in the world which can consume one's overwhelming emotions, because one loves others through the mind and that love has barriers and limitations. Due to its selfish nature, the moment love is given to others it rebounds. It is reactive and not consumed. Neither one's wife, friends, children nor anybody else can consume the emotions that

are within. Just as the rain that falls in the monsoon season cannot be contained in one tank without overflowing and causing disaster, in the same way, when one projects one's emotions onto other human beings, they are not able to absorb the entire stock, so the emotions overflow within one.

How does bhakti yoga fulfil a basic need in human nature?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga is the path of becoming acutely aware of the need to channel one's feelings and emotions towards transcendence rather than towards the mundane. If one channels feelings, emotions and actions toward transcendence by dedicating, surrendering and transforming them and by feeling that one is only a medium and tool, then the egos can be managed. Therefore, bhakti yoga is a tool for channelling the expressions of human life towards transcendence. Bhakti yoga has to be understood in this context and not as yoga of devotion.

Devotion is a natural outcome of diverting oneself from the mundane to the transcendental. When one eats food it fills the stomach, not the mind, yet in the mind one feels happy and the thought comes, "Now I am full, happy, well fed, and my heart is content." Just as there is a science of mental and inner fulfilment when one eats, similarly devotion becomes a natural expression. It is not something one needs to learn; however, one has to learn how to channel the expression of emotions, feelings, thoughts and actions towards transcendence.

Can bhakti be described as pure love?

Swami Sivananda: Emotions are generally considered as a hindrance to perfect realization, but only certain emotions are of a binding nature while others will liberate the jiva from bondage. The concept of God does not rouse in man any binding emotion. It is pure emotion devoid of carnality and attachment. One cannot develop earthly love towards God. The concept of God and love for God arouses the purest of emotions and it is far better than the evil emotions which

overpower a person day and night. Those who cannot still all emotions must have at least pure emotions. This is the significance of divine emotion on the path of bhakti. Love for God can never be the type of love cherished towards wife, children and property. There is a difference, though even love for God is given an earthly colouring like that of son, husband, father, friend, by some devotees who find it difficult to break all earthly connections at a stretch.

What is the place of guru and God in one's emotional life?

Swami Satyananda: Emotions should be preserved, and they should be used for a higher flight into the realm of consciousness. In order to sublimate and channel the emotions, one must turn to the path of bhakti yoga.

Every human being has emotional potential and varieties of emotions within. At certain stages one is aware of brotherly, platonic, marital and paternal love. For the fulfilment of these needs, different people come into one's life, for example, mother, father, brother, sister, friend, lover, wife and child. However, just having a child, a husband, a wife or a girlfriend does not fulfil the needs of the emotions. There comes a time in one's life when, despite all these relationships, one experiences a type of vacuum. This occurs when one has become aware of a higher and more refined state of emotional love called devotion. To find fulfilment one needs two more relationships. One is the guru-disciple relationship and the other is the God-devotee relationship.

The relationship between guru and disciple and the relationship between God and devotee complete the whole structure of emotional needs. If one is preparing vegetable curry and leaves out the two most important ingredients, it will not taste right. In the same way, people of the world have been trying to live happily with many relationships but have been missing the two main ones.

To feel love for all that is around you, you must be able to see the divinity in all beings. And to see the oneness of divinity, the heart must be pure and the mind must be stable.

So, to awaken a true feeling of love for the entire creation, one's whole being has to undergo a thorough cleansing.

When does a guru enter one's life?

Swami Satyananda: When a person grows he has another need: to have a friend in the guru. For him the guru is not merely a divine being but one to whom he can give the best of his emotions, not the ordinary, lower emotions, but the refined forms of emotions. If a person has a refined form of emotion, then he definitely needs a guru. If he doesn't have these refined forms of emotions, he certainly doesn't need a guru. Therefore, devotion to guru or love of guru, with the finer emotions, with the sublimated nature, is not an indication of a retarded personality. Rather it is the indication of a growing and progressing personality.

Loving one's brother, friend or child is emotion; loving one's father or mother is emotion; and loving one's property, wealth and material possessions is also emotion. In this way the emotions are dissipated. If one can cut off everything else completely, one can connect with God or guru. At present one's devotion is partitioned – eighty percent is for the things of this world and only a little bit is spared for God or guru.

How do we know we are progressing on the path of bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: The emotions heighten all experience; they intensify power in thought and action. Everyone knows this from personal experience. Normally, however, the emotions are scattered in all directions. They rarely have force, except in cases of intense anger or intense fear. They are generally expended on many interests and sentiments. On the path of bhakti yoga the emotions are concentrated on one thing. Emotions are transmuted into devotion.

This concentrated emotion leads to heightened sensitivity. The whole mind and body become highly tuned, like a radio antenna. This leads to heightened sensitivity to other people, their thoughts, feelings, and so forth. It leads to sensitivity to the inner environment of the mind.

It leads to peak experiences. Even one peak experience is enough to transform one's whole attitude and understanding of life. It moves through an angle of one hundred eighty degrees. One realizes that what seemed so obvious, true and acceptable before was totally wrong. The relationship with life undergoes a total change, a complete reorientation. These peak experiences are on the route to perfection; they are signposts on the path.

What is the role of symbols in bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Human emotion has no colour, no character, no form, no shape. Emotions take on different colours according to their association. The same love, the same emotion can be both material and spiritual, but there has to be a connection. When one sees one's child, affection is felt. The emotion became affection when it connected with the child; it becomes love when connected to another person; greed when connected with money; jealousy when connected with somebody's affluence or greatness; anger or passion when connected with something different. It becomes bhakti, devotion, when connected with the transcendental nature.

Just as anger is a natural expression, bhakti is also a natural expression. Nobody has to teach one how to be angry, passionate or envious. It happens naturally, due to identification, due to association. The same happens in bhakti. However, in order to create this focus of emotion, to experience bhakti, one needs a point of focus and concentration. Symbols play a major role. One perceives God or that reality only through symbols. If one sees a crescent moon or a star, one knows it is a symbol. If one sees a cross, an image, a form, it is known as a symbol. If one sees a painting of Rama or Krishna, Devi or Buddha, one knows it is a symbol and nothing more than a symbol. Something carved from a rock or a piece of wood remains a symbol. When focusing on the breath and doing one's mantra, the breath and the mantra are symbols on which one is focusing. The focus is on something manifest, something physical, and

as one can identify with it, it takes one deeper. Symbols and forms have an importance. That is *sakara*, or manifest form.

EMOTIONS AND CHAKRAS

How does yoga define love?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga means union. When two things become one it is called union. Love should also mean that. Love is not merely talking to each other sweetly, not just embracing, not merely saying, “My darling, my darling.” That is romance. This does not mean that romance is unnecessary, for many people need it just as children need toys. However, there is a higher aspect of man’s mind and consciousness, and it is called union. This union can occur between the two complementary constituents of the personality called Shiva and Shakti.

In the human body, within the framework of the vertebral column, there are two channels passing from mooladhara chakra up to ajna chakra, known as ida and pingala nadis. Through certain practices, such as *shambhavi mudra*, eyebrow centre gazing, *trataka*, steady gazing, pranayama with *kumbhaka*, breath retention, and kriya yoga, the forces of ida and pingala can be united. When the energies of these two channels are united a current is created and then the energy descends to mooladhara chakra and awakens the sleeping kundalini shakti. This union is the highest of all unions, and when it occurs one begins to feel that everybody is a part of oneself and the whole world is one’s expansion and expression. The difference between oneself and others is not seen and there is no feeling of separation from other things. So, love is yoga.

Do certain musical rhythms affect the various chakras?

Swami Niranjanananda: Music or sound, according to yoga, has a definite influence on the different centres of body and mind. In Western psychology they explain that some types of music and sound excite the mind, while others relax it. The

sound and music that are used in yoga are known as mantra and kirtan. The sounds are mantras; the music is kirtan and chanting.

There has been some good research done in Japan by Dr Hiroshi Motoyama. He is a psychologist and engineer, a Shinto priest, a university professor and the director of the Institute of Religious Psychology in Japan. He used yogic mantras and combinations of mantras in the form of kirtan to see which different centres of the brain, body and mind are influenced by them. His books on the subject give an in-depth answer: he found that every sound, every consonant and vowel influences a particular centre of one's personality. For example, 'Ah' influences the heart centre – satisfaction, enjoyment!

The different drumbeats, Chinese drumming, Japanese drumming and the classical Indian tabla, have a particular effect on the personality, mainly on the nervous system. Some forms of drumming excite the nervous system and increase the activity of the brain. Other forms relax the nervous system, like a slow steady beat – Boom . . . Boom . . . Boom . . . Boom! African drums, which are very slow, steady and constant, relax cerebral activity. Each rhythm influences a particular chakra. In the tala system of Indian music there are one-beat, two-beat, three-beat, four-beat rhythms, and so on. Ektal, the one-beat rhythm, affects swadhisthana chakra. Teentala, the three-beat rhythm, affects anahata chakra and chartala, the four-beat rhythm, affects manipura chakra.

What is the relevance of the chakras in understanding emotions?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti deals with a deeper level of expressions of consciousness, called emotions. They are not rationality, not logic, not linear and sequential understanding, but a more powerful and uncontrolled force of energy. Bhakti yoga says that these emotions are expressions of the mind, expressions of the consciousness, happening at a deep subtle level. They are the undercurrents

which cannot be seen on the surface of the ocean, but which are powerful and strong enough to pull one out to sea and drown one. People can swim through vrittis on the surface, but *bhavana*, emotion, catches them, and because they are deep under the surface, they are also often guided by and associated with instincts.

Instincts are natural, unconscious, inbuilt behaviours responsible for survival. The four basic instincts of life are ahara, nidra, bhaya and maithuna. *Ahara* is craving happiness, fulfilment, satisfaction – physical, mental, emotional. *Nidra* is sleep, disconnection, *bhaya* is insecurities, fears, and *maithuna* is sensuality and sexuality. Sexuality is represented in mooladhara. Swadhisthana represents fear and insecurity. Craving is represented in manipura, and nidra is represented in anahata, where you disconnect, disassociate.

Sensuality is a by-product of having come down to this earth. The original seat of kundalini is swadhisthana, not mooladhara. *Swadhisthana* means one's own abode, the abode of kundalini shakti. It has gone through insecurity, fear, change and transformation from a transcendental existence to a non-transcendental existence. When kundalini came into this material world, due to the influences of the senses, mind, maya and prakriti, it came to rest in mooladhara. For the material person kundalini is in mooladhara, but the real abode of kundalini is swadhisthana. As the mind becomes more material, it becomes more sensuous and the moment you begin to withdraw the mind, insecurity, the fear of losing, comes up, which is the swadhisthana experience. The moment one is able to manage phobias, fears and insecurities, kundalini rises. Managing the insecure, fearful state of mind is much more difficult than trying to manage sexuality or cravings or even the desire to sleep.

In the yogic tradition, at present kundalini is in mooladhara, and therefore one has to try to awaken it from mooladhara. Swami Satyananda says that the switch to awaken mooladhara is in ajna. The ajna practices are

given first, before mooladhara, swadhisthana and the other practices. In the sequence described by yoga, mooladhara by itself is not a centre; it is the abyss, the pit in which kundalini has fallen after having come into this material dimension influenced by prakriti and maya.

When one works with ajna chakra, one develops intuition. In mooladhara, one develops gross passion whereas ajna chakra is transformed passion. Intuition takes one beyond material attractions and bondage. Therefore, ajna chakra becomes the switch to awaken and stimulate mooladhara. Then one moves to the level of swadhisthana. It is said in the yogic literature that once kundalini passes through swadhisthana and one is not fearful or insecure anymore, not afraid of change and able to move smoothly from the previous tamasic conditioning to the development of sattwic conditioning, there is no danger of falling again. Once kundalini passes through manipura, there is no going back because even the desires, the craving aspect, have been controlled. The ego has been overcome.

This helps one to understand the relevance of bhakti yoga along with other yogas. Raja yoga deals with the upper part of the interactive consciousness called the global mind, the social mind, the material mind, the worldly mind. Bhakti yoga deals with another range of inner experiences, mental experiences which are more subtle yet more powerful than the linear, logical experiences. The rawness of energy, shakti, is felt there. It is the balance between the rawness of shakti and the passivity of consciousness which leads to realization, the union of Shiva with Shakti in sahasrara.

What is the relationship between emotions and the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: The idea of mind and heart is not physical; they are the functions of one complete being: you, me, all of us as individuals. The mind and heart are the two attributes of life: one the linear, sequential and mathematical process, known as the mind, and the other the artistic and creative process, known as the heart. The mind is not

situated inside the brain. The experiences of the mind are not only inside the brain, and the experiences of the heart are not felt only inside the physical heart.

When one thinks intensely the heart does not react, it does not palpitate furiously, the blood pressure does not shoot up, yet when one is under some kind of duress, anxiety, anger or fear, then the physical heart responds to the situation. That is a different aspect altogether.

Human beings have moved through three phases in the course of evolution. When they first appeared on this planet, they were very much instinctive beings, reacting to different situations without thinking, without analyzing or even feeling. That space is known in yogic terminology as *dahar-akasha*, the lower or deep space encompassing mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras. As they evolved, they began to respond to different feelings and not to thoughts. When they met with a sabre-toothed tiger or a mammoth, or when another tribe came to attack them, they would feel fear. When they went to attack them, they would feel a kind of elation. Thus, they started working with the *hridayakasha* area, the heart space, experienced between manipura and vishuddhi chakras. As they evolved further, they moved up, and now humans live in *chidakasha*, the head space. In fact, many have actually lost the ability to feel for they have become so sequential, so mathematical. They have lost the ability to feel and to be creative. They consider the intellect to be superior.

What is the outcome of pure emotions?

Swami Niranjanananda: The purpose of bhakti yoga is to attain purity of emotions. When this is achieved, one is able to connect with the environment and people, and understand their needs as one's own and one's attainments as their attainments. The mind becomes connected with each and every person, and that is when the true and pure expression of love is realized. That love is not physical, carnal or emotional. It is universal and transcendental.

In the ashrams of enlightened rishis and masters, animals forgot their differences. The tiger and the goat would drink from the same pool of water at a place where an enlightened being practises austerities and tapasya. The animals forgot their own natures due to the impact of the environment. The compassion and love there is so strong that the aggressive and fearful natures are forgotten. Before a master one suddenly feels at peace. All anxieties and worries have dropped away. One had many questions, yet now there are none. The mind feels totally relaxed – “It is a peaceful environment. I had so many questions in my mind, now I can’t think of any.” That is due to the subtle love emanating from the yogi or the sadhu, which smoothes out all the wrinkles of the mind.

Can women awaken anahata, the heart chakra, more effectively than men?

Swami Satyananda: In order to improve the effects of anahata chakra one should definitely practise bhakti yoga. The awakening of anahata chakra is not only a way to find God or a way to guru, it is also a way to create unity and harmony in family life.

Therefore, among Hindus there is a custom. Most Indian women are initiated into bhakti yoga at a young age. At the age of four, five or six this training takes place and they begin to practise devotion to Shiva, to Sri Krishna, Sri Rama, Vishnu, Lakshmi and Durga, because it is easier for women to develop anahata chakra. There is another tradition. When the initiation is given and the centre for meditation is indicated, the women are told to concentrate on anahata chakra and the men are told to concentrate on ajna chakra. With the practice of bhakti yoga the development of anahata chakra becomes complete.

How do the chakras influence bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Human beings tend to live in three chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura, and never use the force of the higher chakras. Even in practical

life people are living in mooladhara, swadhisthana or manipura.

Mooladhara represents hard and strong attraction to sensory and sensual pleasures, swadhisthana represents insecurities and fears, and manipura represents a strong personal, self-orientated drive, desire, ambition and craving. These are the chakras that are active in every individual. They are not awakened. Awakening of these three chakras only takes place with the rising of kundalini. That is different, but prior to awakening they become active and they are active in us right now.

Few people have actually experienced the higher chakras. The emotions which express currently are not anahata emotions, rather they are emotions coloured by the power manifesting in mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura. People have never experienced pure emotion. They have never experienced true emotion. Psychologists and psychiatrists talk about emotions, yet these emotions are always influenced by the attributes of mooladhara, swadhisthana or manipura.

Whatever emotions they have expressed in their lives until now, whether positive, in the form of affection, compassion, joy and happiness, or negative, in the form of hatred, jealousy, greed and anger, have not been pure. They are always tainted by the three lower chakras. People have not gone beyond manipura. Even those people who think their heart chakra is opening up are deluding themselves, for the opening of anahata is a transcendental experience.

Mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura represent the world of maya; anahata, vishuddhi and ajna represent pure unconditioned feeling, provided one has the ability to transcend one's worldly nature and intuitively become one with other people and the environment. These three higher chakras belong to the realm of bhakti. After ajna is sahasrara – here the experience of God takes place.

Therefore, whatever form of bhakti one may practise, its expression should be free from every kind of influence of

mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura. Then one's pure nature can be experienced.

How can one love without the feeling of fear?

Swami Niranjanananda: If one wants to be free from the fear associated with love, then the definition of love has to change. People do not know how to love as the consciousness is stuck at the level of mooladhara. Although love exists, it is coloured and tainted by the influence of mooladhara, which is the desire for stability and security. When one transcends mooladhara and comes to swadhisthana, love takes another colour. When one comes to manipura, the colour of love changes again, becoming more aggressive and dynamic. As long as the expression of love is at the level of mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura, there is bound to be fear.

Real change is felt only when the consciousness comes to the level of anahata and one connects with the positive expression of love. Love is a quality, not a desire; it is the inherent nature of a human being. Just as each element has an inherent quality, a nature that it expresses optimally, love also has a quality. At the level of anahata love expresses itself differently; it becomes a nature, not a desire.

At present people want love out of desire, whether biological or sexual, to fill an emotional vacuum, out of insecurity or a desire for comfort and safety. That love is mental, emotional, psychological and sensual, and is defined as gross love. The most basic form of love is when one seeks to fulfil a need or vacuum in life. When love simply becomes one's nature and a part of life without thinking about it, then the concept of love has taken on a different meaning as it is not coloured by desire. This is the love that the masters have said one must try to attain. The greater the influence of desire on love, the more one is subject to the influence of guilt and fear. This can only change when the desire for personal fulfilment and satisfaction at gross levels changes to the experience of pure love.

Sthitaprajna is a form of love where wisdom prevails over the needs and desires. In that love one experiences peace

and bliss. It flows through the senses, becomes energy and radiates out. This love can make people forget their own instinctive nature.

What is the difference between spiritual and human compassion?

Swami Satyananda: Anahata chakra awakens refined emotions in the brain. There are many people in the world who practise kindness and charity, but they have selfishness. Their charity is not an expression of the spiritual compassion related to anahata chakra, it is human compassion. When you have human compassion, you open hospitals and feeding centres or you give clothes and medicine in charity. How to know whether an act is human or spiritual charity? In human charity there is always an element of selfishness. If someone wants to make another person a Hindu by giving charity this is a manifestation of human charity. Or if someone wishes to make another person a follower that kindness is human kindness. However, when anahata chakra awakens all of one's actions are controlled and ruled by unselfishness and one develops spiritual compassion. One understands that love does not involve bargaining; it is free of expectations. Every form of love in the world is contaminated by selfishness, even the love one has for God, as there is expectation from him. Perhaps in this world the love with minimum selfishness is a mother's love. Of course that love is not totally unselfish; however, a mother's sacrifices are so great that her love has minimum selfishness.

The qualities of anahata chakra can be awakened by many methods. The symbol of anahata chakra is a blue lotus with two interlacing triangles in the centre. This lotus represents the opening of man's heart. Music, art, sculpture, literature, poetry – all these are important aids to the development of anahata chakra. When anahata opens the understanding of all people changes a lot.

Once, Buddha was going for an evening walk. He came across an old man. He was greatly moved by the sufferings of

old age. Next he saw a dead person, and again he was very moved. How many times do people see old men? Are they moved like he was? No, because their minds are different. Awakening of a chakra alters the frequency of the mind and influences the way one perceives and relates to others and the environment.

REDIRECTING EMOTIONS

What will be achieved once emotions are channelled?

Swami Satyananda: To experience bhakti one must redirect one's emotions from the inauspicious to the auspicious path. One must take the flow of the river of desires to an auspicious course. It has been said:

Shubhabhyam ashubhabhyam vahanti vasana sarita.

Between the auspicious and the inauspicious flows the river of desires.

The river of desires is called 'emotion'. This river is not seen, but felt. Emotions flow within everyone like a river. One can control this river, change its course and turn it into a channel.

However, one cannot have half of the emotional self here and half there. One cannot experience anger and bhakti at the same time. The rule of fifty-fifty does not work. There needs to be one hundred percent sublimation of emotions, a complete change of course. What will be achieved through this? Grace.

What is the outcome of scattered emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Man has infinite emotions within him, an ocean of emotions within this body. He can love everybody or hate everybody, but he will still have surplus emotions. When loving other people he does not receive the right response. As a result there is frustration, the mind becomes restless, passions rise high and one takes recourse to ambitions, fantasies and many other things, but that doesn't work.

Therefore, in yoga, there is the science of bhakti yoga, which means redirecting, channelling and sublimating the emotions which have been directed to worldly things, to limited dimensions. One has to direct the emotions to where they will be properly used and engaged.

What is the basis of emotion?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga means sublimation of the emotional forces, and emotion means energy in motion. Motion refers to something which is moving, something which is active, and emotion is felt inside. Emotion is not received from the outside; it is felt within and then projected and expressed outwardly. Energy is expressed in many ways: aggressively, gently, lovingly, compassionately, crudely. These emotions occur when association of consciousness with the senses and sense objects takes place. If consciousness is disconnected from the senses and sense objects, emotions will not surface. The link of consciousness with sense objects brings forth the emotional expression.

When one looks at a child, for example, a response of affection or love surfaces. When a connection is made, an emotion is instantly felt; however, if there is no physical connection or connection based on memories, there is no emotion. When direct perception or perception based on memories occurs, a connection takes place, identification takes place, and an emotion manifests. When money is seen on the ground, a connection takes place and greed is experienced. When one sees or remembers a friend or a lover, affection or passion arises in the mind.

In this manner, emotions are energy expressions which flow outwards from the individual when consciousness is linked to a particular object through perception or memory. This happens naturally, spontaneously, automatically and unconsciously. Generally there is no voluntary control over emotions. Emotions that affect the mind are tamasic emotions. Tamasic emotions jolt the mind into aggressive and dynamic activity, or *rajas*. Sattwic emotions, on the other hand, are subtle and do

not disturb the mind. Thus, instructions on bhakti yoga have been given to manage emotions. In bhakti yoga, emotion is directed inwards towards discovery of the Self.

How does bhakti yoga connect the aspirant with the inner spirit?

Swami Niranjanananda: When the awareness is material or gross, the energy is diverted outwards for self-gratification and self-fulfilment. The search is for an object that can give sensorial and sensual satisfaction. Passion becomes material, gross and sexual, and the mind becomes obsessed by it.

When the same energy is channelled towards the inner self in bhakti, it becomes a powerful tool to unite the individual mind with the inner spirit. Therefore, the *parampara*, the tradition, says that the intensity of the material, physical energy that manifests in the form of lust and sensorial passions can be reduced by following the principles of bhakti yoga. Through bhakti yoga, that energy is channelled, purified and harnessed, making it a vehicle to undertake a journey towards the spirit.

How can one learn to manage emotions and understand them?

Swami Niranjanananda: The way to awaken the positive qualities of the heart is to divert the extroverted emotions towards the self. When emotions are extroverted, there is always a negative or self-centred response from the emotion. When the emotions are guided towards the self, the response is balanced and harmonious, and guided by inner wisdom. In this case, the negative responses do not affect the behaviour of the emotions.

When emotions are harmonized and pacified, the mind is automatically directed to imbibe virtuous qualities. It is directed to imbibe the good, the positive, the constructive and the creative. Uplifting emotions then play an important role in life. The way to manage emotions, to understand them and guide them has been defined in bhakti yoga.

How can one sublimate negative emotions through bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* (sutra 65):

*Tadarpitaakhilaachaarah san kaamakrodhaabhimaanaadi
tasminneva karaneeyam.*

Having once dedicated all activities to God, the devotee should show (if at all) his desire, anger, egoism and so on, only to Him.

This yoga sutra refers to the process of sublimating every one of the emotions and directing it towards God. All one's actions, internal and external, should become a sacred offering to God. Only then will they be transmuted and welded into pure devotion or bhakti.

If the devotee is angry, he is angry with his Beloved; if he is proud, he is proud of God; if he has a desire, God alone is the object of that desire. The persistent thought of God, whether in love or even hate, transforms the heart into a sacred shrine. Ravana hated Sri Rama. He attained a high state after his death because his mind dwelt constantly on God. Just as God is the object of His devotee's love, even so is He the object of the latter's desire, anger and other emotions.

As no one else exists in the eyes of the devotee except God, who else will become the object of these last emotions or impulses? Emotions which stand as obstacles in the spiritual path are changed into aids when directed towards God. Passion and anger become absorbed in God. The devotee who entirely depends on God can make Him the object of his passion, anger and pride.

On one occasion Radha became angry with Sri Krishna because of some mischievous pranks played by Him. She said to her companions, "Do not mention His name to me. I shall never meet Him again, so long as I live. Let not Sri Krishna come in my presence. Do not allow Him to enter the gate. How can people who indulge in hypocrisy

like Him be trusted?” Anger may be directed towards the object of devotion; it will then take the form of dispassion and renunciation. When one’s anger is directed against one’s own evil qualities, one is only purifying oneself. The evil impressions will vanish and the sattvic nature will fully manifest.

What is the process that leads to the natural and correct expression of one’s emotions and energies?

Swami Niranjanananda: Just as hatred, anger, greed, jealousy, love and compassion are expressed in external interactions, bhakti is expressed in inner interactions. Moods and emotions are evoked in the course of the day and most of the time these emotions are being directed outwards. In meditation, when one is able to direct the same emotions inwards to discover inner harmony, peace and joy, then that meditation becomes bhakti yoga. When the natural flow of emotions is diverted inwards, there has to be a point of focus for them. In the external world there are the sense objects to choose from, yet what is there inside?

The heart is where energies manifest. This energy becomes the aura, the electromagnetic field around the physical body. When one is angry the aura is red; when one is depressed the aura is grey; when one is sick the aura is yellow; when one is healthy the aura is green. These colours of the aura reflect the energy which is generated in the heart centre in anahata chakra.

Bhakti means merging, coming together. When the channels flowing outwards are redirected to experience the inner self, the inward flow of emotions is bhakti. With the perfection of bhakti yoga one is able to transcend the negative and restrictive conditionings of tamas. Actions in the world do not become the cause of mental or emotional blocks or bondage.

When one redirects the emotions, two things have to become the focus: guru and God in the form of energy and consciousness. ‘G’ stands for creation or generation, ‘O’

stands for organization and maintenance, and 'D' stands for destruction, transformation or change. Therefore, the word God defines the aspect of creation and generation, organization and maintenance, and destruction, change and transformation. This is how God is an expression of the cosmic energy in life and in one's body.

Bodies are changing continuously, new cells are being born, old cells are dying. The cells and systems of the body are maintained not by one's effort, but by some other force. God is active within. He is generating the cells, maintaining them, destroying them. That process of G-O-D is happening inside at all levels. That experience of energy is continuous in the body, but one is not aware of it. It is working and functioning at such a subtle level that there is no conscious awareness of the changes taking place within. The body is the microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic consciousness.

When the emotions are directed to God, one comes back to the first stage of bhakti, which is pious association. The second component of bhakti is cultivating appropriate understanding. The third component is to become humble, to become egoless. The fourth component is to use mantras to change, transform or alter the normal behaviour pattern of human expression.

If one works with the entire range, one will find that this connection with God is actually fine-tuning, realigning and adjusting the psychological and emotional behaviours. The strength of God is not seen in a forceful tornado but in a soft gentle breeze. In the same manner, the experience of God in bhakti yoga is one of peace, joy, auspiciousness, truth and bliss. Therefore, the yogic traditions have defined God as *sat-chit-ananda*, truth-consciousness-bliss. The concept of God has been defined as *satyam*, *shivam*, *sundaram*. *Satyam* means truth, *shivam* means auspiciousness and *sundaram* means beauty.

From this perspective, one has to discover the truth through the practice of bhakti yoga. That is where unmasking becomes the first attainment in bhakti. Where one begins

to remove the masks and becomes natural; one becomes truthful to oneself and knows it.

There is the example of a spiritual master who participated in an archery contest. Each participant was given a bow and three arrows. The bull's eye was about thirty metres away. When the master's turn came, he was confident. He let the arrow fly, but unfortunately it did not go straight. He picked up the second arrow and carefully checked the air, adjusted his body and cautiously shot the arrow, which only went half way. The third time he picked up the arrow, shot and it went straight to the bull's eye.

One of his disciples asked him to explain his behaviour. The master said, "The first time it was an over-confident person shooting the arrow. An over-confident person thinks he can achieve anything, yet always misses the point. Then he becomes under-confident and even after taking the precautions, he fails. The third one was the natural me."

'Me' here means the natural self, not the over-confident or the under-confident person, the natural self. This is removing the mask, according to bhakti yoga. When one becomes natural, when there is no imposed projection of an image, when one is able to guide and control the energies in motion within, one is able to cultivate the positive, optimistic and qualitative form of life.

What should one do with one's negative emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga may be difficult because one can't be totally selfless, but bhakti yoga is easy because one has everything – anger, fear, jealousy, greed, passion, carnality – it's all the same stuff. Sublimate jealousy. If one wants to be jealous, be jealous of the guru. If one wants to be angry, be angry with the guru. Abuse him! But it is not done. People say, "God, you are my father, you are my mother." They don't say, "God, you are a wretched person." They don't say, "God is guilty," because they are too scared, because they think God is like a policeman. If they don't drive their car properly, they will get a ticket. If they abuse God, He will

take away their children, money, family and everything else. However, this is not correct for God is exactly as they are.

Why is bhakti yoga suited for people with strong emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti yoga is the yoga for people who are emotionally rich. They want to love everybody. They have charitable natures, compassion, mercy and understanding for all the beings in this creation. They have so much emotion in them that after giving their love to their children and family members, they still have a surplus, and these surplus emotions should be properly directed. If they are not properly directed they will create problems in the mind. Bhakti can be practised by offering the surplus love to guru, to God, to humanity, to everybody.

To be a true bhakta, should one devote one's life entirely to God?

Swami Satyananda: There has to be a balance in life. You have to have as much devotion to God as you have cravings for enjoyment. Enjoy this world as much as you can, but side by side give as much devotion to God as possible. This is one of the main subjects of the vedic scriptures. It has been said in the *Ishavasya Upanishad* (v. 1):

*Om eeshaa vaasyamidam sarvam
Yatkincha jagatyaam jagat.
Tena tyaktena bhunjeethaa
Maa gridhah kasyasvid dhanam.*

All this, whatsoever moves in this universe,
Is indwelled by the Lord.
Therefore, through renunciation do you enjoy
And do not covet anybody's wealth.

Does a bhakta need to develop and enhance feelings?

Swami Satyananda: People do not have to be told how to develop their feelings. They only have to be taught how to direct their feelings. Only the channelling of feeling is

required. Bhakti is absolutely natural for everyone. All one has to do is just change the direction of the flow. The same feeling which was running towards jealousy, anger, greed and passion has to be redirected, and then it becomes bhakti.

Throughout history there have been many wretched, passionate and debauched people, but something happened in their lives and within a second, within the twinkling of an eye, they became great bhaktas. They did not have to develop that love because it was already in them; it was only misdirected or misguided. As Kabirdas has said:

O my brother, no man can experience the pain,
Other than the one whom it hurts.
On the way a wounded man wanders,
But there is no sign of a wound on his body.
The sadguru has shot an arrow of separation
Which is tormenting the whole body.
This arrow hit Dhanabhaka, Raidas,
Namdeva and Mirabai.
It also hit the kings of Balakh and Bukhars
Who abandoned their kingdoms.
Ramka, Banka and the barber Seva
Were also hit by the same arrow.
The servant Kabir says,
Whoever was hit properly and endured it
Became victorious in this life,
Ever engaged in the service of the Lord.

How does one root out hatred from daily life?

Swami Sivananda: If one really wants to root out hatred and develop pure love, one will have to serve that person whom one's mind dislikes. On hearing that one's bitterest enemy is sick, one will have to run immediately to his house and attend on him day and night, just as one attends on a sick wife, son or mother. Even if inimical feelings arise in the heart one will have to subdue them by frequently raising the opposite, positive feelings of love. This is doubtless a trying, difficult

sadhana, but the benefits are wonderful. One will become a centre of power and energy; one will become a 'spiritual giant' indeed. One will become an embodiment of love.

When a person tries to control anger when somebody has injured him, he should not only check the big wave of anger but also try to eradicate the internal burning which remains even though he does not speak harsh words or express outwardly any signs of anger. This is most difficult, but it can be done by continuous service and love. Whenever a friend is annoyed with one, speak to him first with a smile and apologize sincerely with tears even though one is right. Serve him with divine love. A vindictive spirit is a deadly enemy of peace, devotion, love and wisdom.

How does one face one's own negative emotions?

Swami Satyananda: I never controlled my anger, never tried to; I never repented for it, nor did I have any guilt about it, nor did I find any remedy, nor did I search for one. Because of my anger all my nervous energies were pushed to one side and I have no problems – greed and other emotions have never struck the mind, just anger.

Of course, religions do not like negative emotions. If there is anger, passion, hatred or jealousy, all the preachers and teachers say, "Don't be jealous, be above hatred and don't harm or injure anyone." They preach goodness and virtue, but this process is delaying a person's evolution because these emotions are being held down and they have to come out. It is very difficult, because when one becomes angry the other members of the family are not happy about it, they don't like it, even though it is necessary. In the life of a householder, getting angry disturbs the other family members. Jealousy and hatred make a person unhappy and unpopular and spoil the mind. From that point of view it is definitely not good to get angry.

All these natural forces must be channelled, they have to be sublimated. There are various methods of doing that, not just one. This channelling takes place by involving oneself

in some sort of dedicated service, or in some sort of artistic expression where one can project one's hatred, passion or frustration. After all, artists only spill their nature in the form of paint. Poets are only spilling themselves in the form of ink. Whether it is poetry, art or service, that is the way through which one channels one's natural emotions. Some sort of channelling has to take place so that the natural instincts are not suppressed.

How can one refrain from injuring others?

Swami Sivananda: One injures another on account of ignorance. If one always bears in mind that God is seen in every person and animal, and that God is seated in the hearts of all living beings, one will not injure anyone. People begin to injure others the moment they forget to see God in others.

How can maya be removed from the mind?

Swami Satyananda: When the mind loves God, it thinks of Him and lives in Him, then where is maya? If the light is on in one's room at night, one doesn't care if there is darkness outside. In the same way, if the mind is filled with God, bhakti, surrender and devotion, there is no maya. When the light is switched on, there is no darkness. That is the law.

What should we do with our emotions?

Swami Satyananda: So far you have served the world with your emotions. What after all did you get? You know too well! Try giving these emotions to Him. Sing before Him! Weep only for Him! Eat in order to live for Him! Become sad because of the separation! Become unhappy because there is still separation! In short, use every emotion for Him, only for Him, and you will be blessed with Divine Grace.

2

Love – Emotion of Oneness

Close the gates of the senses. Shut the door of the mind.
Light the lamp in the inner chamber of your heart and
stand face to face with the Lord.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

WHAT IS LOVE?

What is love and what is bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: What is the form and content of bhakti? What is this bhakti made up of? Total love, extreme love. When all love is assembled at one place, it is called total love, bhakti.

Why is everyone capable of love?

Swami Sivananda: The innate nature of all beings is to love an external object. One cannot but love or cherish something in the heart. The Absolute alone exists. Love for external things is an unconscious internal urge to become unified with everything. For in reality man is everything, the Absolute Itself. Man is only an ego, apparently separated from it. Love is the forerunner of experience. Love is the craving, experience is the fulfilment of it. None can live without love for something.

What is love and what does it mean to love?

Swami Sivananda: Love is the law of life. To love is to fulfil the law, and to fulfil the law means eternal peace and everlasting happiness. This world has come out of love, it exists in love and it finally dissolves in love. Love is the motive-power of the universe. Love is life, love is joy, love is warmth. Love is the golden tie which binds heart to heart, soul to soul.

Love is constructive and creative – it binds and builds. Love is the principle of regeneration. Love is an actual substance one can use with confidence. Love is a positive, concrete thing. One who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work wonders. The law of love is a far greater science than any modern science. The law of love prevails among saints and good men.

To live is to love. To love is to live. One lives that one may learn to love. One loves that one may learn to live in the Eternal. A life without faith, love and devotion is a dreary waste; it is real death. There is no virtue higher than love; there is no treasure higher than love; there is no knowledge higher than love; there is no dharma higher than love; there is no religion higher than love; love is Truth; love is God. God is the embodiment of love. In every inch of his creation, one can verily understand his Love.

Love is the immediate way to Truth or the Kingdom of God. It is the life-principle of creation. It is the highest expression of the soul-force. It is the sum total of all the duties of religion. It is the magic wand in the hand of a devotee by which he conquers the whole world. It was the driving force behind Mira, Radha, Tukaram, Tulsidas, Gouranga, Jesus and the God-intoxicated Sufis, Mansoor and Shams Tabriez.

How far can love take the devotee?

Swami Satyananda: I know it is very difficult to love. Every time we have loved we have stumbled and we have failed to assimilate it. Still humankind has not understood exactly what it is. Love is an experience in which we can achieve the vision of inseparability, where there is none whom we do not love.

I do not know whether I love you as my children, or whether I love you as my brothers and sisters, or as my grandmothers and grandfathers, but definitely, when I feel it, I feel it too much, and sometimes it becomes unbearable. When love becomes unbearable, when it crosses the brim, there is nothing more to achieve.

How does one journey towards love?

Swami Satyananda: Everybody wants to give love to others. Love has to be developed within, but love does not grow without facing hatred, jealousy, greed, selfishness and mean-mindedness. These negative aspects have to be confronted if one is going to climb up towards love. At different points these rascals and demons will be encountered: Miss Jealousy, Mr Arrogance, Mrs Selfishness. One is in search of love, but one may stay with jealousy for a lifetime. By the time one realizes this, however, one is old and cannot climb any more.

What is the role of love in bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to Swami Sivananda and the scriptures, bhakti is not devotion, but an expression of deep love, intense love, nothing more than that. As the love grows more and more inside you, it becomes bhakti in the course of time. Love becomes bhakti when it is selfless. That is the only condition placed on it. Love becomes a limiting factor when it is selfish, self-oriented.

What is the role of love in bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Love is the foundation of bhakti yoga. Without love one cannot place trust or faith or belief in anyone. If one believes in someone, it is because one loves them. Love is the primary ingredient. However, the quality of the love one experiences when involved in the objective world is conditioned and self-oriented, not unconditional and pure. If aspirations are fulfilled by loving somebody, only then will one love that person. Otherwise he or she has no meaning in one's life. That is the natural human condition.

Love, trust, faith and belief are only given when one is totally involved with all one's faculties. When not involved they do not exist. In order to develop bhakti, unconditional love has to be activated and expanded. This is achieved by recognizing the suffering of others as one's own, being a Good Samaritan, understanding the difficulties of others and helping them to find happiness and contentment. That is the expansion of love.

Eventually this pure love is also transformed. Love and compassion are synonymous terms. Pure love is compassion; impure love is self-oriented desire. The path of bhakti is the movement from self-oriented desire to the unconditional expression of compassion. Worship, chanting, selfless service and prayers are a means to awaken this dormant love, to overcome and transform our present conditioning and develop a broader vision of God's existence in life and in the world. Therefore, bhakti is developing unconditional love, which in turn is transformed into compassion and gives rise to the experience of faith and belief. When love, compassion, faith and belief are attained, that is the culmination of bhakti.

How can one practise universal love?

Swami Sivananda: It is easy to talk of universal love, but it is difficult to put into practice. Petty-mindedness of all sorts comes in the way. Old wrong impressions act as stumbling blocks. You can overcome all obstacles through willpower, patience and perseverance. Feel that the whole world is your body, your own home. Feel that all beings are images of God. Feel that the one power of God works through all hands, sees through all eyes, hears through all ears.

What are the various types of love?

Swami Satyananda: Everybody in the world wants to know what love is. It is a part of one's being. When one does it in a planned way, it is rational. When it is prompted by a higher force, it is psychic. When it is only for the satisfaction of the animal senses, it is physical.

Rational love means the communion between two persons which is arrived at after a lot of thinking about the pros and cons. Those who want to develop love on a rational basis have to think in a particular manner and then they have to take into consideration different actions and reactions that will follow in that love. One sees the whole thing before one's eyes and ultimately one decides that the love should proceed. Love itself is not emotional or rational. Love is love. But one has an emotional, rational or psychic background.

Once one really loves God or one's child or one's wife or husband, nothing can destroy that because love is imperishable and immortal. Whether the wife or husband misbehaves, nothing can destroy the love. Love is not an expression of the intellect, emotion or a particular relationship. It is an expression of man's deep rooted divinity. Mahatma Gandhi has said:

Love never demands, it always gives.
Love always bears, it never grieves.
It is never fretful,
Nor does it take revenge.

What are the two types of love according to Sufism and bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Love is twofold. One is mundane love and the other is transcendental love. Sufism says there are two types of love. One is *ishq hakiki*, divine love, the other is *ishq mazazi*, worldly love. They are the two forms of bhakti. When love flows through the senses it is worldly and when love flows through the heart it is divine love.

Ishq hakiki is love for the eternal truth. Truth is defined as everlasting and eternal. Things that come and go are worldly. Ishq mazazi is love for worldly things like flowers, music, dance, literature, human beings and children, which come and go, are born and die. Today one loves them and tomorrow they may no longer even exist. Love for such things cannot be called everlasting or eternal. Love for

all the divine things, like God, satsang, the scriptures or humanity differs from love for worldly things.

Loving the transitory things of life is mundane love, and when the mind goes after things which are permanent it is divine love. When the mind runs after transitory things it is called desire and passion and when the mind is searching for something permanent, something of an abiding nature, then it is known as divine love. Divine love is bhakti.

The Sufi scriptures say there are two expressions of love. One is real or divine love which is transmitted from the spirit, and the other is material love where the mind and senses interplay and where matter in the form of body and object is involved. This earthly, material love, empirical in nature, is the cause of all man's pain and agony for it blinds his vision. On the other hand, divine love is far more powerful and an important element in bhakti yoga. In whatever form one practises bhakti, whether ceremonial worship, praying, singing or repeating God's name, without love it is tasteless. It is fruitless for it is on the surface level of the mind and senses. This is why today millions and millions of people who believe in God fail to gain maximum help and the miraculous benefits from this divine source.

What are the various ideas of love?

Swami Niranjanananda: Love is not hugging and going gaga over someone. People in the world have distorted the concept of love. The usual concept of love revolves around the body and emotions, yet actual love is not physical or emotional, rather it is spiritual. The Gopis felt it for Krishna. They all had husbands and families but they pined for Krishna. They suffered the agony of being separated from him. That is a kind of bhakti love. Seeing the oneness in everyone, seeing the presence of divinity in everyone, that is a kind of jnani love – working and striving to make everyone happy so that nobody should feel there is something missing in his or her life.

Why can one love someone dearly, but due to an incident the love diminishes?

Swami Satyananda: Love and hate are two sides of the same coin. The one who loves also hates. There is a love-hate relationship between mother and child, husband and wife. This is especially true of those with weak minds.

If one loves someone and later the love decreases, what is wrong with that? If love reduces, it is a good thing; at least one is free. Love is a net that traps everyone. In the same way that a fish gets caught in the net, love is a net that traps. If this love lessens for some time, then it can be considered to be a good thing. At least for some time one will be free. Lack of love is good for a person's spiritual life. So many people feel that love is a bond or fetter. If someone is just not used to living without it then that is a different matter.

In what way do we experience different levels of love?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga aims at making love pure, transcendental and focused, by getting rid of fear and guilt, by providing focus and direction for the emotions. When love is said to emanate from the higher self it becomes fulfilling. One belongs to the world due to associations and identifications with the world. When one identifies with the love one receives from someone, then one's own consciousness will move up or down to the same level as theirs. Love is not simply an act of giving; it is also an act of receiving. When one gives love, one receives love and when one receives love, the mind adjusts to the nature of love being received. However, the exchange happens at a superficial level.

In bhakti yoga, a focus is given to the channelling of emotions and an effort is made to make love into a spontaneous expression of the self while interrelating with the manifest world.

What is the difference between love and emotion?

Swami Satyananda: Love is not being emotional and passionate. There is a clear-cut distinction between love and

emotion. When one speaks of love, it is a vague idea. Love is the feeling of oneness with others, feeling for others as one feels for oneself, being able to feel the difficulty of another person as one feels one's own. That is one expression of love. Therefore, in love, duality is fused into unity – two become one. Sometimes emotions come and take the form of love. It is very important to know this. There is a clear-cut distinction between love and emotion; they are two substances completely, but they look almost alike.

With love one feels oneness behind diversity. However, the definition most people give to love relates to emotional activities, which suits most people, but any experience of love related to emotional activity is not infinite. If one loves an object or a person, there is always a kind of reaction. One's love for that object is not durable and permanent; there is fluctuation every now and then. How can that be love? Love is a higher experience, an experience that has to do with the experience of total unity. Therefore, when loving the attitude has to be continuous, constant and consistent.

Love requires a lot of sacrifices: comforts, idiosyncrasies, ego, money, life, everything. In love there is just giving and not taking. Love is an act of giving and giving and giving, and giving, and not taking. Khalil Gibran says:

I fell in deep love with the world
And the world also behaved in the same way.
That's why all my smiles were on their lips
And all their tears were in my eyes.

A lover gives love. There is the story of Romeo and Juliet, and also the story of Laila and Majnu. In love one gives and does not expect anything in return. When something is expected in return, it is not love; it is something else. To attain love the mind has to be purified and a lot of experiences undergone in life. That is only possible when one is a pilgrim, when one is searching for God.

How would a pilgrim's love be described?

Swami Satyananda: Sri Krishna was the incarnation of celestial love on earth, an element that is missing everywhere today. At present people have everything but lack love. Love is that aspect of emotion where one thinks about others, not about oneself. That is love. Love is giving, not taking and expecting. Love is sacrifice. Love is not an act. Love does not expect anything. If I love you, I do not expect anything from you. It is just dedicating. It is total consecration of the emotions. Sri Krishna was the symbol of that aspect of life. When he walked it was love that walked, when he smiled it was love that smiled and when he laughed it was love that laughed. *Madhuradipaterakhilam madhuram* – O God! You are nothing but sweet love.

Why does one love higher objects or persons?

Swami Satyananda: First and foremost it must be remembered that a person has infinite love within. He wants to love someone and he does – he loves his wife, he loves his children, but still he finds that he can love much more and what he receives from other people is disappointment. Therefore, he begins to love God, he begins to love a spiritual being or he begins to love a guru or some higher objects. When he begins to love higher objects then he obtains peace of mind, for when one loves without *shraddha*, faith, there is agitation, disturbance and frustration, but when one loves with *shraddha* there is contentment.

What other classification of love exists?

Swami Satyananda: There are two distinct forms of love. Firstly, there is ego-centred love, in which one loves another person, deity, saint or whatever with the expectation of love in return. This is the most common form of love and is really a love of oneself, not of someone or something else. Secondly, there is egoless love. This is love for the sake of love, without any expectation of love in return. This form of love is *bhakti* and is felt even when it is not returned. This

type of love may exist for some inexplicable reason; or it may exist due to some natural resonance or compatibility; or perhaps the love exists due to the realization of the deeper nature of the other person or deity. In a higher sense, there cannot be love for another person, for other people, for a deity, and so forth because of the understanding that everyone and everything is really one's own self. Others do not exist. This is non-directional love – love that goes out and returns to the bhakta.

Ego-centred love will chain one to the finite, whereas bhakti, intense non-expectational love, leads to the infinite. One limits, whereas the other leads to the unlimited. Bhakti or egoless love does not depend on beauty, wealth or reciprocation of love. Bhakti should be felt even if one is rejected. This is a test of the sincerity of devotion. The great Indian bhakta Rasakhan, who was born a Muslim but who worshipped Krishna, said, “Bhakti is the fountain of all sweetness. It is not dependent on youth, virtue, beauty or riches, nor is it tainted by self-interest or thoughts of personal gain.” Ego-centred love tends to quickly subside with time, whereas bhakti increases and grows with every passing minute.

It has been said that if an individual wants love and exchange of love, then he is a seller of love. His love is not love; it is mere self-interest. If instead of the love of God one is after certain powers, then that love will be self-interested, or in other words it will be an activity to achieve a particular end. A bhakta gives a wide berth to self-interest. He alone says, “I am your selfless devotee and let my love be disinterested. I am yours and you are mine. I want neither moksha nor power, intellect, prosperity, abundance, greatness or anything; all that I want is selfless devotion which day by day will grow from strength to strength at the feet of Sri Rama.”

Why can't love and ego coexist?

Swami Satyananda: Intellectual persuasion will not do. One may analyze oneself for decades and decades, but one is not going to change, for the ego cannot be subdued, cannot be

eliminated without developing the highest form of love. When there is no sun there is darkness, and when the sun rises there is no darkness. Ego is a negative force. This is important. Darkness is a negative force. The sun is a positive force. Positive overcomes negative. Just as the sun removes darkness, love removes ego.

Love and ego cannot coexist. Where there is ego there is definitely no love. Where there is love there can be no ego. There is a process of giving and giving and giving. One gives oneself completely. Where is the ego then? Therefore, it is necessary to change the quality of the mind.

How does maya deceive people into a counterfeit idea of love?

Swami Satyananda: Love is an idea to overcome the idea of insecurity. Many people say they love God, but they want something from Him. They don't like their job, they don't like their house, they don't want to die; they don't want to suffer. There has to be total unselfishness. Love and selfishness can't stay together.

However, there are practical realities in life. There is some sort of link existing between mother and child, between husband and wife, and there is some sort of obligation between one individual and another individual. There is some sort of expectation. These practical realities must be borne in mind. I don't want someone to harm me and that person doesn't want me to harm him. That means I should not do unto others that which I do not want to be done to me. If that is the definition of love then it is okay!

How did Sri Krishna express transcendental love?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Krishna was a compassionate person. No other person in history has been as compassionate: not Buddha, not Christ. There is a story that Sri Krishna had 16,000 wives. Some people even joke about it and say he was the biggest playboy the earth has ever seen. However, which society, whether past or present, would allow

a person to declare, “I have 16,000 wives,” and for those 16,000 wives to accept one husband?

The story is that these women were kidnapped by a king and liberated by Krishna. In eastern society and also in western society the belief is that marriages are made in heaven. When people have been kidnapped and kept in bondage in another kingdom by another king, their purity and chastity will definitely be doubted. When Krishna liberated the women he knew they would be rejected by their society, families and friends upon their return home, as they were no longer pure, so he married all of them. Did he marry out of passion or out of compassion?

Society accepted this, for they knew that Krishna’s love was not physical or carnal. His character was such that people knew he was providing shelter and support. Krishna himself had eight wives to whom he was legally married, and he provided social protection for the 16,000 wives so that they would be able to live in dignity. Krishna radiated love. When we speak of love we always think of carnal, physical love, however, love does not mean a physical relationship. These are gross definitions of love. Real love is transcendental.

Radha was supposed to be Krishna’s lover. She was many years older than he was and married to someone else, yet today we do not remember the names of Krishna’s other wives. In India, songs of love are dedicated to Radha and Krishna to show respect for the love that existed between them. People bow their heads to that idea, that belief, that philosophy.

Mira was born a few hundred years ago. Her love for Krishna was so intense that at the time of her death, her physical body dissolved into the statue of Krishna. She did not die a physical death as people do. The force of her love was such that her physical body merged with the statue of Krishna. People cannot understand such an expression of love. When they hear about it, they respect it and bow their heads in reverence. Such love is definitely transcendental.

Krishna's teachings were to develop transcendental love and to be involved with karma. If one can understand these two concepts, one will find that many of doubts about life, spirituality and dharma can be clarified.

LOVE FOR THE FAMILY

How does love manifest in the family?

Swami Satyananda: When successful, parents love their child, they not only love him but expect something from him. There may not be a materialistic expectation, but the same love is expected in return. Expectations of others are always selfish. If one loves someone, it is natural to want love in return, and when the expected love is not returned there is frustration.

Similarly, one wants the person one loves to behave, live, think and act in a particular way which perhaps one thinks is better. If one person practises yoga, he wants the other person to practise yoga. If he doesn't practise yoga, he doesn't want the other person to practise yoga. If one is an orthodox Christian, one wants the other person to be an orthodox Christian. Or if one is an atheist, one wants him to be an atheist. Whatever one's personal choices and desires are, one wants the same thing from the person one loves. That is why there is frustration between married couples, between parents and children, and between two people who love each other.

What are the flaws of earthly love?

Swami Sivananda: Love of the body or skin is passion. Love of God is prem or devotion. It is pure love, it is love for love's sake. Loving someone to attain a selfish gain is selfish love; it binds one to this earth. Loving all beings with Narayana bhava as manifestations of the divine is pure love, divine love which leads to liberation.

A husband loves his wife not for her sake but for the sake of his own self. He is selfish; he expects sensual pleasure from her. If leprosy or smallpox destroys her beauty, his love for her ceases. There is physical passion in this love. There

is deep selfishness. The love is mercenary. In mercenary love there cannot be any real happiness between the lover and the beloved. If the husband is dying, the wife takes the bank passbook and walks to her mother's house quietly. If the husband loses his job for some time, the wife shows a wry face, speaks harsh words and does not serve him properly with love. This is selfish love. There is no real affection from the core of the heart, no element of sacrifice. So there are always quarrels, fighting and *ashanti*, absence of peace, in the house. Husbands and wives are not really united. There is always a tug-of-war. They pull in all directions, dragging a dreary, cheerless existence.

Even sisters of ill-fame show abundant love, sweet smiles and honeyed words towards their customers so long as they can extract money. Can this be called love and real happiness? There is cunning, diplomacy, crookedness and hypocrisy here. In every earthly love there is hollowness, a jarring note, a hidden doubt and a flaw. However, true, pure love is rich, profound, full and flawless. It is eternal, unchanging and infinite. Selfish passion seeks gratification through others, but pure, divine love seeks to make the beloved happy and to derive happiness from the happiness of the latter. Love is sacrifice. To love is to share and serve.

How can one get around these usual frustrations of love in the family?

Swami Satyananda: It has to be accepted that to live in the world one has to be pragmatic. Therefore, love is an item of utility, and when love becomes an item of utility then it has to follow the inevitable consequences of frustration. If frustration and disappointment are not wanted, there has to be a certain type of attitude towards the other person: leave him to be free, let him think as he thinks, let him live as he likes. Only the love is wanted.

There is another point. Does one want to love the other person, or be loved by him? The problem arises when one wants not just to love the other person but wants love in

return. This difficult situation has to be avoided. In families, people are always looking at how the other person loves them. When they feel that the other person's love has diminished, they are scared and try to increase the quantity of that love. Therefore, it has to be understood that love from the person who is loved is important. One's love for the other person is an expression of one's personality and emotion. Every person wants to love. He needs it, but at the same time there is another need. He wants to be loved, and there the problem starts. There is also another side. Someone loves a person but is not being loved in return. Then they feel they have a problem.

In family situations the place and the importance of love in one's life has to be properly understood. The emotions, attitude and behaviour have to be adjusted. If one finds that sometimes the person one loves is not up to standard, it is important not to nag. Thereby a peaceful relationship is maintained.

What is the difference between worldly love and a bhakta's love?

Swami Niranjanananda: The concept of love in today's society makes a person weak, and that is not the purpose of love. Love is defined as affection, caring, sympathy, yet is that really love? The social concept of love is sensual, sexual and emotional. Something that pleases through the senses is considered to be love. Something that is imbibed emotionally and is pleasing to the self is defined as love. So many things are included and believed to be love or expressed in the garb of love, yet it actually inhibits the development of inner strength and makes people weak.

One cannot say that love is conditional or unconditional until one has come to a point where one is able to distinguish between personal love and impersonal love. What is the role of God in relation to humanity? What is the role of a mother in relation to her children? If it is said that God loves all and that a mother loves her children equally, then what is the

expression of that love in life? The love that exists between parent and child is true love. Between husband and wife or between lovers is conditional love. The only unconditional love that exists in life is between mother and child. In that love any kind of sacrifice can be made. It is not an overprotective love. It does not suppress life; it nurtures life. The nurturing is important as it develops inner strength.

A mother loves her child. The child is part of her body, part of her spirit. Propelled by that love, the mother ensures that the child always has the right opportunities to grow. If the child is sick, in pain, if the child has gangrene, for example, the mother will carry the child to the doctor and say, "Amputate the leg so the child can survive." The child will not say to the mother, "You are amputating my leg because you don't love me anymore." However, this happens with adults. The moment something happens, the love is shattered.

How can family life become the training school to learn how to love?

Swami Satyananda: To cultivate bhakti, first cultivate love. God has sent people into *grihastha ashrama*, household life, to learn lessons in love, to learn to give to others. It is the training school. All the facets of love are experienced in the family. A person learns to love as a mother, which is maternal love. One loves one's husband or wife, which is romantic love. Loving one's sister or brother is sibling affection. Different relationships enrich different forms of love within.

Love has various aspects and qualities, but when all these aspects combine and fuse together, it is said, *Tvameva Maataa cha Pitaa Tvameva* – 'You are my Mother and my Father.' At present when these words are uttered it is only lip service, but if there is bhakti then one really feels what one is saying.

What is one of the most important lessons about love that can be learnt in a family?

Swami Satyananda: Nobody is really prepared to give themselves up in love. Everybody expects to receive love,

but nobody can really give love. A wife expects love from her husband and a husband expects love from his wife, but as long as there are expectations, there cannot be an exchange of real love. This is a certainty. Real love will never be known as long as expectations are still lurking around.

The only secret of making love successful is to give up expectations. A husband expects his wife to be devoted, loyal, obedient, soft-hearted, beautiful, well-dressed, tender and gentle. What the wife wants I cannot say. It may be just a reversal of the roles of give and take. Throughout life it is the attitude to love that is important, whatever the age. From today onwards think about only one thing: "I must give, give, give." This will make all the relationships cordial. Then one's relationship with God will also be discovered anew.

What is the highest form of love between a husband and wife?

Swami Satyananda: The husband should be like Rama to the wife and the wife should be like Sita to the husband. However, it does not happen because it is an ideal and nobody applies it to their life. That is why the relationship between man and woman has not produced any positive result. In tantra, it is clearly stated that the relationship between a man and a woman has three purposes: first, progeny, second, pleasure and third, samadhi. People have had the first and second experiences, but how many have the third? There has been no awakening because the relationship between husband and wife must be adjusted in youth and often during old age.

A man of eighty and his wife of seventy may still love each other. What problem is there? Love has nothing to do with the body; it is a feeling, and the sexual relationship is an expression of it. However, that is not the total definition of love; it is not even a definition at all. The marital relationship is purely spiritual, and it has to be readjusted, redefined and recodified. This relationship is not only for progeny and pleasure. Kundalini awakening can take

place and does take place through this relationship. It has taken place in many tantric yogis, and tantric texts are the chronicles.

Sita and Rama loved each other very much in order to show the world how to live. The message sent by Sri Rama to Sita through Hanuman touches the heart:

O my beloved,
The secret of our love is known to my mind only,
And that mind is always directed towards you.
Now only you can fathom the depth of our love.

After returning from Lanka, Hanuman describes Sita's condition to Rama:

Your name was the guard, day and night,
And meditation on you was the shutter.
The eyes were fixed on your feet.
How could her prana leave the body?

In modern life that ideal is changing. For the last one hundred and fifty years, people have not necessarily agreed with this ideal. They say, "If the husband is good I will love him," or "If the wife is good I will love her, but if she is bad I will divorce her." This is the trend, and there is a reason for it too. There are many husbands who treat their wives badly, who snatch away their ornaments, sell them in the market and then go to the racecourse. There are bad men in the world, and that is why the change has taken place.

How should one understand detachment?

Swami Sivananda: An aspirant must cherish perfect detachment towards sensual enjoyment and objects, and destroy any infatuation for these. Infatuated love for the body, children, father, mother, wife or husband is completely different to a devotee's absolute love of God. Attachment to the body is deep-rooted. Thoughts of the body, food, wife and children alone can make you forget God. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna advises Arjuna (13:9–10):

*Asaktiranabhashvangaḥ putradaaragrihaadishu;
Nityam cha samachittatvamishtaanishtopapattishu.*

*Mayi chaananyayogena bhaktiravyabhicharinee;
Viviktadeshasevitvamaratirjanasamsadi.*

Cultivate freedom from attachment and identification with children, wife or husband, home and the rest;

Constant even-mindedness amidst pleasant and unpleasant events; detachment from worldly-minded people, and constant and unswerving devotion to Me. (9–10)

An attitude of detachment towards sensual enjoyments and objects destroys all sorts of infatuations and desires. Attachment is death, detachment is eternal life. One who is detached from the world experiences the worldly drama as a witness and passes beyond grief. Detachment is neither inaction nor foolish austerities; it is upholding a mental attitude in the course of daily action. Worldly people attach importance to external show only and this is their mistake. A person may have nothing, yet his mind may be full of desires. A renunciate may be attached to his loin cloth or begging bowl although he lives alone in a forest, whereas a king may remain perfectly detached although he lives amidst luxuries and opulence.

What should parents avoid when expressing their love to their children?

Swami Satyananda: Children are genetically and psychologically equal to their parents. The parents love their children because they feel that they are very close to them. On the one hand, parents express their closeness to the children but, on the other hand, they bully them and order them about as if they were servants. Where is the love? When the guru, father or leader says something and everyone who is subordinate has to accept it, that is dictatorship. When there is love there is no bullying. Love is equality, not dictatorship.

Why does love become the cause of sorrow?

Swami Satyananda: Many people in the world commit suicide due to love. Many run away from home. Love is the cause of all this. Love comes from a selfish cause. Love does not exist without selfishness. Only God and a mother love without selfishness. Other than them, whether it is father or sister, daughter or anyone else, there is a little bit of selfishness in every kind of love.

Is a mother's love selfish?

Swami Satyananda: No, I have not had any such experience. A mother believes it is her right to love her child; she prays for the child's progress and gives him the instruction to walk along the right path. She definitely wishes that her son or daughter would get married, that they would have children, however, she has no expectation. Having a wish, as opposed to an expectation, is a different thing. There has been a lot of contemplation on this; I have also given it a lot of thought.

When I was leaving my home, I did not say anything to my mother. She was a member of the Congress Party and was in jail at that time. I asked my father and he said, "Okay, go." I said, "I will leave after meeting mother." Father answered, "Don't meet her. She will tell you, 'Don't go' and you will stay back." I then asked my maternal grandmother who was present at that time. She said, "No, your mother will not stop you." This discussion went on between us for some time and in the end I did not go to meet my mother.

A mother has nothing to do with a son's success or failure. The mother is only a representation of love towards her child. What she is towards others is a different matter. Her feelings change a great deal when it comes to her daughter-in-law, yet she has unconditional love towards her child. She always looks upon the child as her own, regardless of whether he is a thief, a dacoit, a murderer, a sadhu, a great soul, a wise one or whatever else. Even if the child is very sick, if they have leprosy or some other disease, a mother will never feel repulsion or fear. I have seen this with my

own eyes. I used to go to the leper's colony and I saw the women there; they felt no fear. Khalil Gibran wrote a poem *On Children* which expresses the attitude parents should have towards their children:

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters
of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.

LOVE AND ATTACHMENT

Why do people constantly confuse love and attachment in their lives?

Swami Satyananda: Love of wife, love of husband, love of son, love of daughter, love for money, this love, that love – all love which is connected to the world is called attachment. The difference between bhakti and attachment is only direction. That is what the saints said about the temperament of divine love and worldly love.

One loves an object for a few years and then tires of it. That is not love, it is infatuation and attachment; it is gross. If it were love it would be continuous. How can a finite object be loved? An object which is infinite in nature can be loved. Infatuation may be pleasant in its own way, but later it leaves nothing but pangs and pain behind. All things that have a beginning must have an end. If love begins with an object, it will end with an object. First of all, that person or object must be converted into one's whole self, and then love becomes complete.

On the other hand, bhakti means pure, true love. What the world calls love is not true love. Love for one's children, mother, brother, wife or husband is not true love; it is attachment, *asakti*. There may be an element of love there, a minute amount, but it is not true love. There is no true love in this world. Bhakti is related with *bhavana*, feeling. A person's first glimpse of bhakti comes from the mother, then from the family in the form of attachment, affection and friendship respectively. Then it is found in the form of a romantic relationship. All love and attachment is a form of bhakti, but it is not pure love. True love is not associated with the body, mind or soul. The basic cause of true love is bhavana or intense feeling. Therefore, look for the relationship with God in which the feelings will stick firmly to Him.

Why do people fall and not rise in love?

Swami Niranjanananda: The mind is too conditioned. The conditioning of the mind directs the vision and desires to that which is physical and gross. Therefore, when people search for love they look for it outside and believe that the other person can fulfil the requirement of love. However, the other person is also imperfect and is looking for someone to receive love from. While person A is expecting love from person B, B is expecting love from A. Both of them have their ambitions, aspirations and limitations, and both are trying to draw energy from each other without giving it

back. Therefore, love becomes sensorial love, it becomes sensual love, it becomes a conditioned idea – ‘I need love’. People don’t know what love is. When there is a search for love, there is a ‘fall’ in love. There is no rising in love. People say, “I fell in love,” yet no one has ever said, “I have risen in love,” which means that love has always been a failure in life. This may sound like a joke, but it is true.

People look for the heart qualities outside. They look for sympathy, compassion, love, friendship and recognition outside; they look for temporary moments of joy to stimulate life and they search for happiness and love. Yoga, however, has a different perspective on developing the qualities of the heart. The yoga to develop the heart is bhakti yoga.

What is an example of attachment that people call love?

Swami Satyananda: In most countries, including India, doctors keep many terminal patients alive, even in old age. There was a lady who was well over one hundred. She couldn’t walk, talk, think, see or even go to the toilet on her own; medicine had to be administered until she passed on. A number of times she was on the verge of death, but the doctors brought her back to life. This is the result of *moha*, attachment, and also scientific experimentation. However, the truth remains that the karmas a person is suffering from cannot be exhausted unless he is allowed to go ahead with a new life. To prolong a life which is useless is interfering with the laws of nature. If a person has access to certain laws of nature, he interferes with the lives of others. If one does not know the laws of nature and an old man is about to die, one will have to let him die a natural death, but if one know the laws of nature, his life can be extended by ten or fifteen years.

In hopeless cases, where a person is unable to contribute anything towards the social, economic or spiritual welfare of others, or to be useful even to himself as far as enjoyment of life is concerned, it is better to let him die. A person can be useful to himself either in the form of spiritual realization or in the form of enjoyment.

This is not intended as cruelty but rather mercy. This is what should be done. Even if one can give good medicines, what is the benefit? If a person has no future, there is no purpose in prolonging his suffering, but obstinate, egotistical compassionates want to assert themselves. I call God compassionate for He explodes civilization after civilization.

How does one detach oneself from emotional ties?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is no need to detach oneself emotionally from anything. There is the emotion that recognized a specific quality which has attracted one to another person. However, self-oriented possessive and destructive associations with emotions should be removed from the sentiment of the emotion. One should also enlarge the scope of emotional attachment. Instead of being attached to ten, one can attach oneself to one hundred, instead of one hundred, to a thousand. In this way one will slightly dilute the attachment. If five drops of black ink are added to a cup of water and the water becomes black, how does one make it transparent again? By putting the cup of water in a bucket of water where it will mix with the larger quantity of clear water and the blackness will dissolve.

One reason for attachment is that people begin to see themselves in the other person and they get attached to themselves through the other person, but they remain totally detached from someone in whom they do not see themselves. When they begin to see themselves in others, the identity of 'me and mine' develops. They identify with the son, daughter, husband, wife, friend, associates, for they are all connected to them personally. Therefore, according to the spiritual precepts of the East, if one loves the son or daughter as one person, one should extend that love to others who have no one to call their own.

It is not about detachment, rather refining the attachment and giving it a purpose. There is greater joy in attachment if it has a positive purpose behind it. Attachment is dry. Love, compassion and affection have to develop with

total strangers, then it is real. It can happen with those who are one's own at any time, but it is not real. Love, compassion and sympathy do not flower with one's own family. It always happens with strangers and that is real love. That love and compassion is an act of reaching out with the purpose of encouraging the growth of another person without the expectation of receiving something back.

What are the various forms of love?

Swami Satyananda: In the world today, ideas that become popular come first from the West. The West has made this word 'love' very popular; they have turned it into a card covered with hearts! Love means the feeling of intimacy a person experiences towards another. A mother experiences intimacy towards her child; this is called *vatsalya* or parental sentiment. A brother experiences closeness with his sister, which is referred to as affection. What a compassionate person feels towards a poor, needy person is called pity or mercy, and the feeling a man experiences towards a woman is called attachment. These are all different forms of love.

Just as milk can be used to make rasagullas, rasamalai or pedha, the feelings that are within a person manifest at various times, in various situations, with various force and in various ways. When one is faced with an enemy one feels hatred. The presence of a friend evokes feelings of friendship. Affection surfaces with one's sister. Pity is felt for a person who is in grief, attachment for a woman, *vatsalya* for a son, respect for guru and devotion for God. These are forms of the one feeling of love. Love means the feeling of intimacy one feels towards another, whatever form it takes.

The word 'love' has been popularized by the West, as in the Bible love is believed to be the central teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the embodiment of love and he preached about love. He said, "Love your neighbours as you love yourself."

Everyone talks of love, yet no one really understands what this means. It is difficult to love in this world. Some

people say love is that which is selfless. The foundation of love is the self. Love is not for another; it is for oneself. It is for one's own joy that one loves. Some say love ties one down; some say it is a trap in which one gets caught; some say love is nothing, just a figment of the imagination; and some say love is an internal process of attraction.

Why is attachment a part of one's nature?

Swami Satyananda: A person without attachment is worthless, just like a vegetable. There is attachment to one's wife, husband, children, property and business. That attachment should be corrected because it produces karma. It influences the mind causing worry, anxiety, tension and increasing blood pressure. That attachment makes one weak and sick; it does not make one happy. All the time one is doing japa, repeating the mantra 'wife, husband, children', so that attachment is not paying off. In fact, it is troublesome.

Therefore, with those who are 'yours', instead of attachment there should only be relationships. One must have a relationship with one's wife, husband and children. Attachment should be left for others. There must be relationships with the family and attachment for those who do not belong to one. When one is attached to one's family, where only self is involved, it is called *swartha*, selfishness. Where another person is involved and self is not involved, that is called *paramartha*, for others.

However, this is an ideal answer; it is not actually possible to practise it. Human beings are born with attachment. People are the product of attachment because when a man and woman, husband and wife, love each other there is attachment, so one is born with this samskara. The *swabhava*, the character, the samskara, the action between husband and wife at the time of union, was passed on, so it can't be helped.

What is the outcome of attachment?

Swami Satyananda: Actions done without attachment will not bear any fruit, either positive or negative. Suffering is not

man's ill luck. When actions are performed with personal attachments, suffering starts. If one can love everybody in the world without involving oneself, one will never suffer. If one can't, one will. Even if one loves one person with attachment, one will suffer.

How are bhakti, attachment and devotion related?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is inherent, inborn. Passion, lust, violence and hatred are the lower forms of bhakti. Attachment is the medium form of bhakti. The same energy manifests in sattwic, rajasic and tamasic directions. If I lose my nearest and dearest, it disturbs me very much. That disturbance is due to the bhakti present in me. If the same flow of energy can be directed to a higher object, it is called bhakti. The lower side is called attachment. The higher side is called devotion.

What is an example of expanding attachment, rather than detaching?

Swami Niranjanananda: To overcome the attachment, one has to expand one's understanding. This understanding comes by realizing one idea: we are all part of a support system which encourages and nourishes life.

Sri Swami Satyananda said many times that instead of buying two pairs of shoes, buy three. Instead of buying three pairs of pants, buy four. Instead of buying two beanies, buy three and give the extra one to an unknown child who is not one's own but with whom one can connect with sympathy in the heart. According to one's ability, one can gradually keep on developing one's family. As the attachments increase, the dependency of the attachment will decrease and selfless attachment will increase. One begins to feel that everyone is a part of one's family and each one who is part of the family needs support and nourishment, just as one gives to one's own family members. Once one is able to come out of the self which identifies 'me and mine' by bringing in one extra person from outside today, one more a year later and one

more in another year, and as one begins to care for these so-called outsiders in the same way that one looks after the insiders, then attachment will expand outwards. That will become selfless attachment, called *nishkama bhava* in Sanskrit.

Sri Swami Satyananda says that he feels peace, contentment and fulfilment, for he has been able to help so many people and give them the inspiration to live with dignity. How to reduce attachment is not a philosophical idea, it is a practical approach. The more one connects with people, the less dependent and emotionally attached one becomes with one's own, and one is able to share one's love with everyone in equal measure. Eventually a realization comes that each person is a support system for the other, so that life can grow and nurture itself.

EXPRESSING LOVE IN THE WORLD

Why make an effort to love those who are not family or friends?

Swami Satyananda: Everybody in the world needs love. Everybody in the world wishes that someone will love them. A sick person wants love, a dying person wants love, a leper who is suffering wants love. A person lying at a street corner, near a gutter, also wants the same thing. The beggar on the street, who has no mother or father and no home, wants love. Love is the main requirement for every human being. If you give love to someone, you are giving it to God.

Kabirdas has said about love:

That which ascends and descends in a moment,
That is not true love, my dear.
Only that love which does not diminish,
But remains constant, deserves to be called love.
Anyone may say, this is love, that is love,
But no one fully knows.
That which remains all the twenty-four hours,
That alone is true love.

Where there is love, there are no rules,
Nor is intellect required.
When the mind is full of love
Who cares about days and dates?

How can love be understood and expressed in life?

Swami Sivananda: Love is the golden link or tie which binds heart to heart, mind to mind, soul to soul. Love is the crowning grace of humanity. Love never reasons but gives profusely. It is not affected by offence or insult. It looks not with the eyes but with the heart. Love makes great sacrifices. Love is anxious to help and serve others and make others happy. Love forgives.

The love of a mother is never exhausted. It endures forever. Love is not getting or bargaining, but giving. Love is goodness, honour, peace and pure living. Pure love is without selfish attachment. It is being willing to suffer for the good of others.

Cultivate pure love slowly in the garden of your heart through *japa*, *kirtan*, faith, service of all beings, meditation and the company of saints. Speak lovingly, act lovingly and serve lovingly. Love your neighbour as your own self. Love God with all your heart, mind and soul.

Can one maintain one's independence when expressing love?

Swami Niranjanananda: Life is not one of independence, but interdependence. People are all dependent on each other. They see interdependence in the house, in the ashram and everywhere. Independence is never actually seen anywhere in anyone's life. As long as people are interdependent, their expressions of love are also interdependent on concepts, beliefs, thoughts, circumstances and actions, and on other people's thoughts and behaviour as well. Dependency is continuous. Therefore, whenever anyone talks of love, they are only speaking from the perspective of interdependence. There cannot be a universal approach to their life.

The spiritual level is something that cannot be spoken of, it is something that is unwritten. Tears flowing from somebody in a state of happiness, joy, contentment, meditation or ecstasy is not spiritual or transcendental. It is an expression of interaction, whatever the thought, feeling or idea may be.

How can goodwill be expressed in the world?

Swami Satyananda: Few people know how to love. Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Zoroaster and all the other saints said, “Love thy neighbour,” because to love is difficult. It is difficult because people don’t know how to love, they don’t know the ABC of love. Love means sacrifice. Love is giving, not taking; it is an act of unconditional giving and giving and giving. “You are mine, I am yours” is not love. Love is an art and a science that has to be learned. True love is the expression of a pure heart.

One prepares for love by doing little acts of kindness. Swami Sivananda used to say, “Bear insult, bear injury, this is the highest sadhana.” One who can bear insult and injury is a strong person. Swami Sivananda also used to say, “Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize, be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate.” Swami Sivananda always thought about others.

The philosophy of love is difficult to understand. The day it is understood by all of humanity, the world will become a place for the gods to visit. All the gods who are supposed to be in heaven will say, “Let us go to this blessed Earth. There is plenty of love there.”

What are the common failings in expressing universal love?

Swami Sivananda: To love man is to love God alone. Man is the true image of God. He is His atma. It is easy to talk of universal love, but when you come to the practical field, you obviously show signs of failure. If anybody talks ill of you and uses harsh words, at once you are thrown out of balance.

You get irritated and show an angry face and pay him in the same coin. Where is universal love?

You do not like to part with your possessions when you see people in distress. A man who is struggling to develop cosmic love and realize Him through love, cannot keep anything for himself more than he actually needs for keeping the life going. He will sacrifice even this little to serve a needy one and undergo privation and suffering willingly with much pleasure. He will rejoice that God has given him a rare opportunity to serve Him.

How can universal love be cultivated?

Swami Sivananda: He who tries to develop universal love should try to possess various sattwic virtues such as kshama, patience, perseverance, tolerance, generosity, straightforwardness, mercy, truthfulness, ahimsa, brahmacharya, nirabhimanata. He should serve humanity untiringly with a disinterested, selfless spirit for many years. He has to kill his little self ruthlessly. He must bear calmly insults and injuries. Then only there is the prospect of cultivating cosmic love.

Love is the fulfilling of the Law. The aim of charity, social service, altruism, humanitarianism, socialism, is to develop this universal love and expand one's heart ad infinitum.

Unity is eternal life. Diversity is death. Unity brings concord, harmony, supreme peace. Diversity brings discord, disharmony and restlessness. Unity is Divine Life or life in Spirit. Diversity is *asuric* life or life in matter.

There is only one language, the language of the heart. There is only one dharma, Sanatana dharma. There is only one law, the law of cause and effect. There is only one religion, the religion of love or the religion of Vedanta. There is only one sun, one moon, one *akasha* or space, one Brahman, one Purushottama and one Chaitanya. Feel the oneness everywhere. Realize the Satchidananda Atman, the common thread of consciousness that links all these names and forms. All diversities, all differences, all qualities which are mayaic or mental creations, will now totally vanish.

Bask in the sunshine of divine love! Anoint yourself with the oil of selfless service! Wear the raiment of purity! Eat the bread of the Name of the Lord! Drink the divine ambrosia of meditation on God! Perfume yourself with the scent of charity and abundant giving! Dive into the divine source and draw inexhaustible strength therefrom! This divine source is full of bliss, peace and joy! It is perfect harmony and pure delight!

Where do people fall short of this ideal?

Swami Satyananda: True love is the expression of the inner self in the language of purity and effulgence of heart. What Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Zoroaster and other saints and sages have said about love is not easy to practise. The most difficult thing is to love one's neighbour who may have been experienced as one's worst enemy. However, the saints were such strong people. They did not say, "Love thy distant neighbour." They said, "Love thy neighbour," for they knew that he is the one who always creates problems in the neighbourhood, fighting and consulting a lawyer over every little matter.

Why is understanding others so important?

Swami Niranjanananda: Love and compassion have no meaning if they are devoid of understanding. The biggest quality in life is not love, it is understanding, opening up the mind and heart through understanding. When you understand, you appreciate. When you appreciate, you love. Love comes with a companion – compassion. So to say 'awaken love' has no meaning.

People have all experienced love in their lives without understanding. Two people are in love, but they don't understand each other, and when passion subsides misunderstandings arise. That love is purely an expression of passion, it is not true love. If somebody loves someone, they hug each other, live together, yet that is not the love one is trying to spread around the globe.

What is needed in life is understanding. With understanding, everything will come naturally and spontaneously. Understanding is the primary requirement of humanity. If there is no understanding, conflicts, confusion and separation will prevail. Without understanding, love dies a premature death.

How is it possible to love the people who are against us?

Swami Satyananda: What is true love? Even if a person talks negatively and is harmful, still one should love them. Saint Francis said this. True love means loving someone despite their hatred, not because of their love. This love is not just emotional, it has to be concrete. It means helping a person who doesn't like you, calling the fire brigade if their house is on fire, not saying, "Oh, who cares if that rascal's house is burning. Let it burn!"

True love has no conditions at all. Just because a person loves me, I should love him? This equation does not work in spiritual life. Saints say, "If you hate me, I love you. If you don't like me, I like you. If you hurt me, I heal you." This is difficult because sometimes a person whom I have been helping for years suddenly gives me a boxing. When I ask him why, he calls me a rascal. When I remind him that I fed and helped him for many years, when he was sick, and gave him money when he was poor, he answers, "That is all your fraud." Even then, one should not lose one's presence of mind, and one's love for that person should not change.

Why is there so much cruelty in the world?

Swami Satyananda: Love is most difficult to practise, but hatred is easy. To be false is so natural. Love gives rise to exemplary behaviour in man, while hatred causes obnoxious behaviour. I am not talking of love between a man and woman here, although that is also an act of love, but of that love which is an expression of compassion for all beings. Love has to be defined in a wider perspective. Usually when people speak of love they think of the feeling between

two people – a man and woman. Love is understood in this perspective, which is incomplete. The love between a husband and wife, mother and son, brother and sister, friend and friend may be deep. However, the love between a devotee and God, or a disciple and guru, where two hearts unite, is complete.

When two hearts are repulsed by each other, there is hatred. Whenever such feelings come to mind, one must say, “No, he does not know what he is doing,” just as Christ said from the cross, “God forgive them, for they know not what they do.” That has to be the attitude. Although one may understand this principle, it is still difficult to practise.

Those who really want to practise love must be prepared to sacrifice as well, because love means sacrifice. In the act of love, even if one is a loser it does not matter, but if one only wants to be the winner, then it is better not to try because the lover is going to be the loser. True love is giving and not receiving.

How is universal love possible?

Swami Sivananda: Selfishness, greed, pride and hatred contract the heart and stand in the way of developing universal love. When the heart is contracted a person loves his wife, children, a few friends and relations only. As he evolves, he loves the people of his own district and country. In the long run, he begins to love all and develops universal love. The barriers are broken and the heart expands infinitely. Love is the hope of this world.

It is said that one must love oneself before one can love others. Is this true?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one begins to love others more, one naturally begins to appreciate oneself more. If one begins to like oneself before one begins to love others, there is a possibility that one will become a narcissist and it may lead to the path of confinement, where the path becomes narrower and narrower. Self-protection will become stronger and stronger and one will become more grossly material in

nature. That is the problem when one loves oneself first and others come second.

Therefore, it should be the other way around. You love other people more and more, not only your family or close ones, but strangers and unknown people. Your act of loving is not sensorial or sensual. You just have to express unconditional love. Unconditional love is the same feelings that you have for people you consider your own. It is selfless love which has to be cultivated, love which is free from expectations, love based on support, friendship, cooperation, a love based on the aspirations of the other person. Parents have to know the aspirations of their children and of each other. In the defined parameters of life, strive to support each other to achieve that aspiration. This kind of attitude has to be developed in the family.

Alongside this, you should also connect with people who are not part of your group or family and feel the same for them as you would feel for your own. Cultivating selfless love will lead to a more positive and creative appreciation of yourself. If you begin to say, “I love myself, I love myself,” then you are actually conditioning your vision to see only yourself first. If you don’t receive sympathy, affection or love from somebody else, your life can be shattered because of your own expectations.

Accept yourself as you are at present and develop the selfless attitude of connecting unconditionally with everyone. Experience the purity of your intentions, your heart and your emotions. That will be a good start.

KARUNA OR COMPASSION

What are examples of compassion?

Swami Sivananda: Karuna is the highest sadhana. Raja Shibi was a king of the Solar Dynasty famous for his generosity. One day a dove flew into his court pursued by a hawk. Raja Shibi offered the hawk a piece of his own flesh equivalent to the weight of the dove in order to save the dove and

satisfy the appetite of the hawk. When this was cut off, both the hawk and the dove manifested their true Divine forms and conferred on him many boons. Buddha was an ocean of love. He offered his body to a tiger cub to appease its appetite. There is no sadhana greater than karuna or compassion.

What is compassion?

Swami Satyananda: Compassion appears to be of two shades. One is an ethical or moral quality and the second is the sum total of self-realization or purity. One can have compassion on the sentimental level which may not be true compassion, but still it is compassion. For example, one may not be pure at heart yet have compassion for humankind, for a community or for a person.

Then there is a higher type of compassion, known as *karuna*. This type arises only when one is completely purified and has become one with oneself. In short, when one has become a *jivanmukta*, liberated in the body, the inherent compassion, not the sentimental or reactionary compassion, arises in the mind naturally and spontaneously. This is the *jivanmukta*'s compassion, the highest of thoughts.

People are only mortals and do not have access to that kind of compassion, but rather to a reactionary type of compassion, which is really a reaction to cruelty. When they feel for the sufferings of their own people it is called sympathy, and when they feel for the sufferings of others it is called compassion.

How can one define compassion?

Swami Niranjanananda: Compassion has to be understood in its broad, not in its limited aspect. It is a special quality. I would even say that compassion is the quality of a person who is awakened internally. All thoughts of compassion are motivated by one idea, concept, belief, situation and condition; every expression of life is coloured by egos, desires and ambitions. If compassion is coloured by ego,

ambition and desire, can it remain pure? Can compassion be experienced as pure compassion? No, compassion is always a quality of a person who is awakened.

What is the quality of the compassion of a saint?

Swami Sivananda: Man is generally compassionate towards himself. He is then nearer the quadrupeds. A little wider-visioned man extends his compassion to his family. He has not yet crossed the border. Another man gradually envelopes the village, district and nation with his compassion. Selflessness to a degree is manifest in him – he is really a MAN. A saint's compassion extends to humanity at large. A divine personality is compassionate towards all living beings, yet within this world. What shall we call one whose compassion flows to planes other than this?

How important is compassion?

Swami Satyananda: People wonder why God does not hear them when they perform rituals and worship, asana and pranayama, study Vedanta, make pilgrimages to Vaishno Devi and Kashi. God is sitting right in their heart, but He is not ready to listen to them because they do not recognize the pain of others. Until they are able to do this, their sadhana will not be successful.

God only listens when one is able to feel the pain of others the way one feels the pain of one's own child. If one's child is in pain or meets with an accident, what kind of a state is one in? Does one think of others like that? Is there one person who has spent a sleepless night thinking of the millions of poor who will go to bed hungry tonight? Everyone is selfish, only concerned with themselves and theirs, not about anyone else. Why then should God who is all-pervading listen? Isn't the one who is in pain God's child as well?

A big change should come about in India, the way it did in England after the two World Wars. English society completely changed and the first thing they ensured was

that every person had food and clothing. Until the basic needs are provided to those who do not have them, there is no meaning to religion, politics, national laws or spirituality. Therefore, it doesn't matter if one doesn't perform the rituals of worship or go on pilgrimages, but it is necessary to have compassion and sympathy in one's heart. These are important qualities for every aspirant.

How does giving relate to karuna?

Swami Niranjanananda: The act of giving is known as karuna. People translate karuna as compassion. *Kara* means hands, something that one does with hands. In karuna there is also this kara. When one spreads one's hands to lift somebody up, that is karuna. When one uses the hands to help somebody, that is karuna; and that is giving with love. It is not compassion, it is not sympathy, it is reaching out to connect with the other person. Giving means reaching out to uplift their spirit – to bring a twinkle to their eyes and a smile on their lips. That is the act of giving and of compassion.

What qualities should one cultivate in order to be able to help others?

Swami Niranjanananda: If one sees a person who is really in need of some help, that feeling, that compassion will make one reach out and help to the best of one's ability.

Seeing a twenty-year-old man with a PhD begging in the streets, one will feel compassion, yet the form of compassion will be different: one might help him to find a job rather than giving him one rupee; one might help him organize his life and put him on the right road.

However, if one sees poor people who have no other option but to beg, the compassion will be different again. One might give them five, ten or twenty rupees out of compassion. Compassion in its real sense will carry *viveka*, discrimination, with it and not just the feeling of pity for somebody.

Why is it important to extend compassion to strangers?

Swami Satyananda: A place has to be found in the heart for people who are unknown to one. One has to act out one's compassion and feelings on behalf of these people. Only consolation by words is not enough. "Oh see, he is full of sorrow, look what karmas he has got." That is nothing. At least give him a glass of tea. Don't turn away the beggar at the gate.

Some people say, "Nowadays all these people have turned wicked." This is not right. Such a philosophy is only to defend one's own petty mind. Nobody, however wicked they may be, will come begging at the gate to cheat one.

I have lived the life of a beggar and can speak from experience. In the whole day a beggar may go to the doors of ten houses. One beggar, even if he works for eight hours, will only go to sixteen houses. Even if he gets two rupees from each house, he will collect only thirty-two rupees. People say, "Look, nowadays everybody cheats. That beggar drinks alcohol, even saints become cheats." Even if he does drink he only drinks country liquor, not cognac. Even if he has drunk liquor, what mistake has he committed? Soma rasa was taken by all rishis and munis. If soma rasa had not been available, they would have taken country liquor if it had been available. A beggar should never be refused at the gate of one's house. If there is no cooked food ready, then puffed rice, onions and salt can be given on a leaf plate.

It is no good wailing, "O God, he has come to my door!" After all he is a beggar. He has a soul and that soul is in everyone. The soul, the light that is inside the beggar is the same light. The electricity in one bulb is the same electricity in another bulb. It is the same electricity in Deoghar and Bombay. The same soul is in everyone, only the circuits are different.

How can people be helped?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone has their own destiny and idiosyncrasies. The best thing one can do to help people is to love them from one's heart.

Over the years I have come across many people, some of whom were very close to me. I found them to be very unhappy and full of negative thoughts, even about themselves. I tried to pacify them, advise them, give them good counsel, but nothing worked. I could always manage those who believed that I liked them or loved them, but if they began to think that I did not love them, and in truth I did not, it was very difficult to get into their minds; they became hard nuts to crack.

In order to help someone, they must be first convinced that they are loved. If they cannot be convinced that one loves them, nothing is going to work. On the contrary, all one's efforts to help will be destroyed by that person and whatever one does will always be taken in a negative way.

What is the secret of compassion?

Swami Sivananda: Compassion for another's suffering is oneness with others: to put oneself in another's place, to ease another's headache is to forget one's own, to mitigate another's grief is to alleviate or dispel one's own. Therefore, one should let the heart melt at the suffering of others.

How can compassion be understood and practised?

Swami Niranjanananda: Compassion is the outcome of wisdom. If there is love, love is the outcome of wisdom. When one looks at a poor man begging in the street what are the feelings? It is not compassion, it is pity. Compassion is the outcome of a person who is at peace with himself or herself. It is the response of a person who is connected not to one but with everyone. People's connection is mainly with their close and dear ones with whom they identify: friends, children, the partner, parents, so on and so forth. They feel for the family members, but they feel for them for they represent their security. They don't feel for a stranger what they feel for somebody whom they consider their own. That means the expression of their affection and love is lopsided; it is only confined to those with whom they associate.

Therefore, the word compassion has been given a different meaning in the yogic context, in the Indian context and in the ashram context – in three contexts.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali describes human behaviour and human relationship from the yogic perspective (1:33):

*Maitreekarunaamuditopekshaanaam sukhaduhkha-
punyaapunyaavishayaanaam bhaavanaatashchittaprasaadanam.*

In relation to happiness, misery, virtue and vice, by cultivating the attitudes of friendliness, compassion, gladness and indifference respectively, the mind becomes purified and peaceful.

Maitri means friendship; friendship with whom? Friendship with a person who is happy, content and prosperous, who doesn't have any demands in life. Prosperity does not mean money. A person who does not have demands in life is prosperous. A person can have millions yet if there are still demands in life, he will never be considered prosperous. One's pockets may be empty yet if one has no demands one is prosperous. Prosperity means to be free of demands. Therefore one should be friendly with those who are prosperous, being free from demands, who are content and happy. One should be compassionate for those who are suffering and are in pain, be happy for those who are virtuous and pious, and finally one should ignore those situations which one cannot change, alter, modify or transform. This is the statement of the *Yoga Sutras*.

It is clearly stated, one should be compassionate towards those who are in pain and suffering. Suffering can be multi-dimensional, personal, social, physical, mental, emotional, local, global. Suffering can take any form and at that time, to alleviate the suffering, the action one takes is the compassionate action which should be assisted and guided by wisdom. Compassionate action is not a random reaction. Compassion is used to overcome one's condition in life as a

tool, as a force, as a power. It is a force that removes distress from life. Any action which removes distress from life is known as compassion.

Compassion increases as the feeling of oneness increases between people. Sri Swami Satyananda says clearly that when one begins to feel for everyone what one feels for one's own people, then that becomes unconditioned love, affection and compassion. When one only feels for one's own people then it is conditioned love, affection and compassion restricted only to oneself and the group with which one identifies. That conditioned love, expectation and compassion always carries a demand with it. Unconditioned love and compassion do not carry any demands with them.

The distorted form of love and compassion is pity, yet in the pure form it is a transformative force to change the detrimental and distressful situations and conditions in life.

How is the beautiful feeling of compassion expressed?

Swami Sivananda: Compassion is feeling for the suffering of others. In compassion you make another's misery your own, and by relieving them you also relieve yourself. Pity, fellow-feeling, sympathy, kindness and tenderness are all synonymous with compassion. The dew of compassion is a tear.

Most people are selfish and have no compassion. They may spend large amounts of money on a car for their children, but they will not spend anything to relieve the suffering of the poor. They have their eyes and ears closed. They do not hear the cries of people in distress. They do not see the stream of tears flowing from their neighbours. They just close their doors and eat magnificent food.

The whole world is one family. Feel this. Open your heart to compassion. Understand the suffering of others and be ever ready to help them. Share what you have with others. Wipe the tears of the suffering. Compassion opens the door to freedom and expands the heart.

DIVINE LOVE

Does divine love mean never asking God for anything?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda said that love is purity of heart, unrestrained goodwill, mercy, compassion, tolerance and absence of sensuality. He said that everyone is an instrument, a medium. People have to be loved and served without passion and attachment, without expectation. Love is awareness! It is not touching anybody's feet, not kissing anybody, not putting one's hand on their head. Love is a feeling within. Love is never physical. Desire and anger are physical. Love is kindness. Through selfless service, by identifying with all, by loving all and by constantly reminding oneself of one's essential divine nature, one can tear away the veil.

One has to love God without asking anything from Him. The purpose of spiritual life has to be to have the vision of the Divine. God has given everything without being asked, so why ask Him for anything at all? He knows what is needed, what is deserved, what one should not have. It has been said in the scriptures:

A man gets everything which he contemplates,
There is not the least doubt about that.
Even supreme and incomparable majesty
Is obtained by one who directs his mind to God.

Whatever has not been given by God was never needed. Whatever God has given in response to one's prayers, be content with that. Whether God has given suffering or comfort, it means it was needed. Kabir has said:

Let that affluence be dashed
Which obstructs remembrance.
Blessed is the suffering which forces us
To remember the Name every moment.

God did not give me what I did not need. He did not give me a wife or a bank account because I did not need them. God cleared my path of thorns, stones, pebbles and

poisonous snakes. He removed the problems from my path. After fifty to sixty years of hard labour I have found a relationship with God. Everyone should search for a relationship and one day they will be successful and find extreme satisfaction and bliss in their family life, married life and occupation. Fears and phobias will disappear.

What is divine love?

Swami Sivananda: Divine love is the sweet mystery of life. It is the greatest thing in the world, the greatest power on this earth. Love is vital to spiritual progress. Love all. Cherish love. Pour it forth on all. Love is the crown of life. It is the true joy of every heart. Therefore cultivate love. True love will ever reign supreme in this universe. This is the truth.

Man cannot live by bread alone, but by love. Love is the best nourishment for life. It is the sum total of all vitamins. Love is all in all. Love is God. God is love. Love embraces everything. It abides in the heart. Love is the illumination. It has the power to make one wise and stimulates the intuition. The nearest approach to Truth or God is through love. Faith, devotion and love are immortal sisters. Love of God arises in a heart that is desireless. Divine love is the only solvent, the one great healer and forgiver.

What is the power of love?

Swami Sivananda: A life without love, faith and devotion is a dreary waste. It is a real death. Love is divine. Love is the greatest power on earth. It is irresistible. It is love alone that can really conquer the heart of a man. Love subdues an enemy. Love can tame wild ferocious animals. Its power is infinite. Its depth is unfathomable. Its nature is ineffable. Its glory is indescribable. The essence of religion is love. Therefore, develop pure love.

How did Mother Teresa live and express love?

Swami Satyananda: Mother Teresa was from Albania. She left for Northern Ireland and became a nun. In the Indian

context, she became a sannyasin. There were riots going on and yet she went there. I was also there and I met her at that time. She then came to India and went to Kolkata. She had only one mission. She would pick up orphans from the streets, bathe them, dress their wounds and feed them. People used to mock her and say she was a Catholic nun and that she was spreading Christianity. However, fourteen- and fifteen-year-old girls saw the work she was doing and decided to join her. They started going there every day. People from very wealthy families would drive to her centre in their cars and distribute one or two thousand blankets.

Mother Teresa took everyone under her wing. She received ill-treatment also. However, she just said one thing, “One who has a husband receives love from him, one who has a wife receives love from her; if not a lot, at least a bit. One who has a mother enjoys a mother’s love. One who has a child enjoys a son’s or daughter’s love. Brothers and sisters enjoy each other’s love. One way or another, most people are loved. They do not need me. However, there are some poor, unfortunate souls who receive love from nobody. There is nobody who cares to know whether they are alive or dead. Instead people look in their direction and spit.”

This is the way of the world, and if there is somebody who can love these unfortunate people, then that person becomes a reflection of God. Sri Rama left Ayodhya, crossed the Tamasa River and reached Shringaberpur. The only person who he found worthy was Nishadraj. He found no true devotee other than Shabari. God has said, “Just as I have loved you, in the same way you must love others.”

How do saints and bhaktas experience bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: The mystics and saints never prayed for gratification of their personal desires or ambitions. If their personal ambitions have been fulfilled at all, it is because God wanted them to be fulfilled. People in the world cannot practise the higher form of bhakti. One who practises the higher form of bhakti does not belong to this

world. When Saint Theresa of Avila used to go into inner ecstasy the stigmata would appear on her hands. What kind of communion was that? Can anyone have that experience in the present condition? When Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to communicate with the Divine Mother, he would lose body consciousness totally and people would call him a madman. Can anyone lose body consciousness? No one has that depth of experience of bhakti.

In the life of Christ and other saints, bhakti was a deep inner experience. People have not reached that level of maturity. Maybe after thorough preparation, having exhausted external links and attachments, one can begin to experience that depth of bhakti, but right now it is not possible. What is possible, however, is preparing oneself to experience bhakti.

How can the concepts of union and divine love be co-related?

Swami Satyananda: God is tied to man through a thread of love. Love does not mean what is seen on television. Love is the term for an emotion where two opposite elements assume union, when a merger between two opposite poles takes place. According to physics every object has a positive and a negative pole, known as *desha*, space, and *kaal*, time. When they come towards each other they merge in the nucleus. In physics it is called merger. This union is yoga. The union that is achieved in meditation or in worship of the divine is also between two opposite elements – purusha and prakriti, paramatma and jivatma. These opposite elements have been ascribed different names.

Union of the material and the spiritual, the mind and the spirit is often referred to. The mind and its thoughts are material, gross entities because the mind has emerged out of the five elements, so it unites with that which is not material. The supreme spirit is not a material object, but a transcendental and omnipresent principle. A material object cannot be omnipresent because it can exist only at one place at a given time, but the supreme spirit is omnipresent as it exists everywhere at all times. One may try to raise the level

of the mind through mantra, make it subtler, internalize it, but it is a material object.

The merger of that material object with the supreme spirit is called yoga, union between two opposite elements. This is the meaning of love too. Love should not be understood through a limited definition, not as rapture and emotion alone. Love is the term for an awareness, remembrance, madness.

What is divine love and what is worldly love?

Swami Satyananda: Transcendental love is known as divine love and also as bhakti. Bhakti is translated as devotion but it is in fact love. When one loves the higher being, when the mind is completely saturated in Him, it is known as divine love. When the mind and the emotions are directed to the mundane objects of the world, when the emotions run after transient things and the mind after the trifling of life, that is known as mundane love, worldly attachment. Worldly love pacifies the body, disturbs the mind and breaks the heart.

Divine love, however, fulfils inner happiness, gives peace to the heart, brings concentration to the mind and ultimately it purifies the whole body. When the mind is directed to God and to guru, to the creation of God and to the disciples of the guru, and to those who are suffering, that is called the enactment of divine love. But when the purpose of love is only self-enjoyment, loving and enjoying one's family and possessions, that is called worldly love.

What is human love?

Swami Satyananda: Human love which is transferred becomes divine love, and divine love which is transferred becomes human love. There is no difference. It is the same intensity of currents that are channelled.

Why is it necessary to develop divine love?

Swami Satyananda: Man is an embodiment of love. His real nature, his deepest personality, is love, not hatred. Man hates because he is taught to hate; it is a superimposition. There

is so much love in man that it becomes difficult to consume or use. He is not able to give this love, which is his real nature, to the things of this world. The love that he gives to his family and friends is only a tiny part of the infinite love that man is.

How can one love a God without form, a God one does not even know or who is so great and cosmic that one cannot relate to Him? That is why it is important, even from the psychological point of view, to have a personal God to whom one can give all one's love and emotions. It is true that He is the ocean of love and can accept and contain all the love which flows to Him. He can definitely give plenty of room to all the emotions which have not been amply rewarded by the people one loves. Divine love is a peculiar love. According to the Indian system of bhakti yoga, God can be loved as one loves a husband or wife, son or father, friend or master. Through these different emotional attitudes, love can be projected.

Without love God cannot be seen, and with love it is possible to see God. It is a kind of puzzle. One cannot say, "Let me see Him once then I will believe." Only when love has first been developed for God can He be seen, because the moment one loves the physical eyes become blinded. It is a different eye that sees, often known as the third eye. When love reaches the brim of life, when it becomes spontaneous and overwhelming, then the eyes that see the material object no longer function. At that time a different vision is open, known as God vision. With the opening of the third eye one can see God.

What is pure love?

Swami Niranjanananda: How can one understand love? There is a Persian word, *ishq*, which means love. There are two forms of *ishq*: *ishq mizazi* and *ishq hakiki*. *Ishq hakiki* is love inspired by the heart, and *ishq mizazi* is love inspired by the mind. Both are love, yet one is stemming from the heart and the other is stemming from the brain. The love

that everybody experiences in their life is intellectual love. Self-interest and personal aspirations lie hidden in that love. Whether it is love between children and parents, between friends, or a man and a woman, you always expect something from the other person. However, the love that springs from the heart is pure love. There is no craving, want or desire in it, only the wish that the love towards one's Beloved may grow and keep on growing.

Swami Sivananda says there are four expressions of love. The first expression is a sensitive heart. The second expression is joyful affection. The third expression is an illuminated, radiant love. The fourth expression is a burning absorption. Just as love in the material world is expressed in a myriad of ways, so it is with God. In the physical world when you love someone you become sensitive to them, a connection is awakened, affection develops, and this emotion steadily grows deeper and finally becomes love. It takes on the aspect of fiery, flaming love and every aversion burns to ashes in it.

Love is an expression that connects a person to his Beloved, to God. On the dark horizon of life it is love that makes a beautiful rainbow. It is also the constant, guiding pole star in life. Love is the mother of literature, art, music, philosophy and patriotism. Without love there is no literature, no music, no art, no philosophy and no patriotism either. Love is such a powerful energy and force that when it awakens a person can experience fullness in life. Love is the fragrance of the heart, in the absence of which one is like an animal.

Supreme love towards God is known as bhakti. If the mind becomes one with what you learn through hearing, what you see through sight, and what you contemplate through thinking, the emotion of love awakens. This is the beginning of bhakti in a person's life. Lacquer is a hard substance, yet it melts and liquefies when heated and hardens again when cooled. While melting the lacquer, any colour maybe added to it and it will take on that colour.

Even upon hardening it will retain the colour. Similarly, first the emotions become soft, and when you add the colour of bhakti to these softened emotions it permeates them forever.

The mind is the same. When the mind becomes one with an object, the colour of the object is seen in the mind. Bhakti has no colour of its own. It is transparent and pure.

Why is divine love like an obsession at times?

Swami Satyananda: A person completely absorbs the image of the person he loves. While eating, drinking, sleeping, walking and working, he thinks only of the object of his love. It is called *surat*, continuous awareness of the object of love. Wherever a lover goes, he carries the memory of the person he loves and can think of nobody else. While talking to someone he is thinking of the person he loves. Surat is continuous obsession. In India, the mark of a suhagin, a married woman, is the vermilion on her forehead. Surat is continuously present; it is that part of the awareness where there is unbroken remembrance of God or any other thing that is held dear to the heart.

Sita was brought up in an atmosphere of enormous prosperity, love and comfort. Her feet were so tender because she had never placed them on the ground. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, (Ayodhyakanda, after doha 58, chau 3) Sita has been described as follows:

*Palaga peetha taji goda hindoraa,
Siya na deenha pagu avani kathoraa.*

Leaving the back of the bed, lap or swing,
Sita has never put her foot on the hard earth.

She loved her husband, Sri Rama, so intensely that she preferred to go with him to the forest with bare feet, rather than remain in the palace enjoying royal comfort. This is called *ishq hakiki*. If a person tries to walk on the road with bare feet for a few miles, he will get blisters, for there is no

love in his heart and no motivation to walk. Sita walked with and for Sri Rama, her husband, whom she loved from the depths of her heart. In the *Ramacharitamanas* (Ayodhyakanda, after doha 122, chau 1 and 3), again it has been said:

*Aage raamu lakhanu bane paachhe,
Taapasa besha biraajata kaachhe.
Ubhaya beecha siya sohati kaise,
Brahma jeeva bicha maayaa jaise.*

*Prabhu pada rekha beecha bicha seetaa,
Dharati charana maga chalati sabheetaa.
Seeya raama pada anka baraae,
Lakhana chalahi magu daahina laae.*

Rama walked in front and Lakshman followed,
Both wearing the dress of an ascetic.
In between Sita appeared to move gracefully,
As Maya lies between Brahma and Jiva. (1)

Sita stepped in between the footprints of Lord Rama,
And walked the distance as if unafraid.
Lakshman stepped to the left of them,
Being attentive not to place his feet
On the footprints of either Sita or Rama. (3)

Why does pure love endure when other love doesn't?

Swami Sivananda: Pure, unselfish love is *prem* or devotion to God. Pure love is a rare commodity which has to be gradually cultivated. It endures or lasts forever. There can be no rupture, friction, weary face or frowning, no decline or waning. It always increases like the waxing moon or the Ganga in the rainy season. Pure or divine love alone can remove all the barriers that separate one man from another. Pure love alone can eradicate all sorts of unreasonable dislikes and prejudices, intolerance and hatred. Pure love alone can unite a Jew and a Christian, a Hindu and a

Muslim, a Catholic and a Protestant, a Brahmin and a non-Brahmin, a Vaishnavite and a Shaivite, a Sanatanist and an Arya Samajist, an Englishman and an Italian, a Chinese and a Japanese, a sannyasi and a vairagi, on a common platform and the care of their hearts.

In the world even best friends fight amongst themselves, even husbands and wives who are united for a long time quarrel among themselves and even fathers and sons are at loggerheads, but there can never be any break of continuity in pure love. Pure love is divine. Pure love is God. God is pure love. In pure love there can never be any tinge or microscopic trace of selfishness. That is the reason why it endures forever. Love is a great purifier of the mind.

Love or prem is a mighty power. It exercises a wonderful power over the beings that come under its masterful influence. Love is a great leveller. All differences between the two vanish. The lover and the beloved are placed on the same level. Pure, unselfish love can turn God into human and human into God. There is no power on earth greater than love.

What is the experience of turning feelings towards the Divine?

Swami Satyananda: There is a state of bhakti called *madhura*, divine sweetness, which is love of the divine in everything. Beauty and perfection are seen everywhere. Wherever one looks one sees the form of the Divine. There is love for everything. One looks outwards and only sees the work and essence of the Supreme. This is an intoxication of bliss. One becomes saturated with bliss, for there is nothing that is not the supreme essence.

It can be compared to the love that a man feels towards a woman, his beloved, or the love a woman shows towards her beloved. However, this love is directed towards everything, yet – and this is the strange thing – it is simultaneously love that is non-directional. It is merely love and bliss in itself. It is not directed towards anything in particular, for this implies

separateness and difference. It is both love for everything and love for nothing specifically.

In India there are wonderful devotional songs which try to depict this indescribable state of all-encompassing bhakti. The great bhakta Tukaram wrote a song, one among many, called *Virat Bandana* in the Maharashtrian language of West India. The rough translation of the title is 'World Prayer'. The first verse is as follows:

In every place are you,
In every shape are you.
Your names are many,
But you are really only one.
Your playground is this visible universe.
In all this play, in all this carnival,
There is verily only you.

There is another beautiful Sanskrit song called *Shyam Ki Madhuri* or *Madhurashtakam* which means the 'sweetness of the Supreme'. It is a song that names all things of the world as being the essence of sweetness of the Supreme. The song expresses the feeling of the person who feels *madhura bhakti*, divine love of everything.

How can one embody a true expression of love?

Swami Sivananda: Live in love. Breathe in love. Sing in love. Eat in love. Drink in love. Walk in love. Talk in love. Pray in love. Meditate in love. Think in love. Move in love. Write in love. Die in love. Taste the honey of divine love and become the symbol and embodiment of love, *prema murti* and *prema vighraha*.

What is it like to be intoxicated with divine love?

Swami Sivananda: A devotee who has drunk the wine of divine love cannot observe the conventional rules of propriety. He is not a slave to the conventional laws of society and scriptures. The God-intoxicated devotee is not conscious of himself. The devotee grows into the likeness of God and

therefore shares His perfection with Him and partakes of His infinite bliss and joy. He has realized the Atman within and beholds the Atman in every creature. He becomes thoroughly intoxicated with divine love. He spends his days and nights singing the praises of God and hearing about His glory. He remains merged in God. He may laugh or weep or sing aloud or dance in divine ecstasy. Through the experience of bliss, he may also become silent and sit motionless like a statue. This is the state of identity or union with the Divine.

The devotee who has given himself to God loses his separate identity. He has no will of his own, as he has surrendered it completely to God. He is simply an instrument in the hands of the God. St Francis of Assisi brought the marks of the crucifixion upon himself through intense meditation on Lord Jesus and joyfully experienced the extreme pain that Jesus had known. The Upanishads compare the Atman to honey; the Sufis often compare it to wine; the Shaktas compare it to liquor; and in vedic yajna it was called soma. All these symbolize the experience of the sweetness of divine bliss.

The devotee who has surrendered to God has divine intoxication. When Gauranga became intoxicated with the divine nectar of love, he sometimes did not know whether it was day or night. On one occasion the young princess Mira danced in the streets amidst crowds of people when intoxicated by her love for Krishna. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa often remained for days without food when he was intoxicated with divine love. Words cannot describe the nature of this divine intoxication. One has to feel it for oneself. Even if there is a mild intoxication, it will give the devotee immense strength with which to face all the difficulties in his sadhana.

How does devotion connect God and the devotee?

Swami Satyananda: The Lord of the universe and infinite plenitude has no pride. He does not even see how scandalous the past life of his devotee was. He looks not at his conduct or anything, not at his qualifications, nor his status, nor prosperity, nor learning. All that He sees is the devotion,

and that also to such an extent that He becomes the slave of slaves and applies himself silently to their service.

As soon as a person begins worshipping God, from that moment his connection with his past, caste, family and conduct of life is broken. God only looks upon him as His devotee. When such a devotee surrenders himself to God, then all his miseries, ego and past life are completely transformed. The fallen woman, the deceitful merchant and the debased person – when immersed in devotion make God their own. Let anyone be whatever he is according to the bible of social conduct, but in the eyes of God his devotion alone counts.

The main thing in bhakti is the undivided love of the devotee for his God. That leads to deep experiences and brings about a sense of identification.

When you live in the love of God learn to efface yourself. Remove the heaps of your ancient samskaras to such an extent that the heart's love may flow out automatically and drown all the earthly desires including yourself. The conversation between the devotee and his God takes place in the stage of oneness, and love of union in adwaita samadhi.

It is desirable that one should allow oneself to be swept away by the tide of devotion without any resistance. When such an auspicious moment of divine grace and love comes, the devotee should desire that, and then he should proceed to efface himself and meet the Divine. Restlessness, longing, intense devotion and memory must always be for the ishta, the Beloved.



3

Devotion – Connection of Hearts

Faith is the eye of wisdom, and devotion opens that eye of wisdom.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

WHAT IS DEVOTION?

When will one taste this divine love?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is like being in love with everything continuously – from humans, to birds, to flowers – everything. One has no choice, for one realizes one's real nature and the nature of oneself and with this 'impossible' relationship, how is it possible not to feel love for everything? When a glimpse is gained of the essence of everything, the essence that is normally hidden from the eyes of most people, bhakti must result. When one finds out one's real nature and the nature of everything one will feel bhakti. One will never be the same person again.

However, this state comes only when one has the grace of expanded awareness. Once one has had a taste of the divine kiss from the lips of the beloved, one will feel unquenchable thirst and aspiration for the supreme consciousness. The bhakta will chase and worship the Supreme like a madman. Everything will be forgotten except the Divine. One divine kiss and one's whole life is transformed.

What is devotion?

Swami Satyananda: When all the love within converges on one beloved, who is Bhagavan, then one becomes the bhakta and the relationship between the two is one of bhakti. There is no external commodity used in this type of love, as when one uses wood to make a chair, table or an idol of Shiva or Ganesha. Devotion is a sweet subject, but a difficult one to grasp. Love is difficult and devotion is equally difficult. As long as ‘me, me’ and ‘I, I’ goes on, devotion will never develop. This ‘me, me, my, my’ is like the bleating of a goat.

God’s devotion is a love affair. Everyone has said this. Devotees have said it. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Mirabai and the great Sufi and Christian saints have said it. In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* it has been said (sutra 2):

Saa tvasmin paramapremaroopaa.

That (devotion) verily is of the nature of supreme love of God.

If a bhakta’s devotion is like a love affair, is it then full of desire?

Swami Sivananda: Devotion is a fire like *jnanagni*, the fire of wisdom that burns up mundane desire. Desires arise from a sense of imperfection or limitation. The feeling of imperfection is possible only when one finds something outside oneself, other than oneself. When the devotee attains God-realization he is not conscious of anything other than God. Therefore, a devotee becomes absolutely desireless. It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 5):

Yatpraapya na kinchidvaanchhati na shochati na dveshti na ramate notsaahee bhavati.

By attaining which (divine love) he does not desire anything else, neither grieves (over any loss or death of dear ones) nor hates anything, does not indulge in sensual pleasures, nor does he feel any urge (for the acquisition of material things).

Desire obstructs the growth of devotion. Devotion to God increases in intensity when mundane desires are renounced. Renunciation is the essence of devotional love. Divine love has no element of desire in it. Devotion cannot coexist with desire of any kind, not even the desire for liberation. The devotee wants God and God alone and His service. The devotee loves God and serves Him and His creation. He does not strive consciously for *mukti*, liberation, but God confers *mukti* on His devotee unsolicited.

What is the difference between prem and devotion?

Swami Satyananda: Another word associated with bhakti is *prem*, which means love. It is a sadhana by itself. When one approaches divinity or one approaches God or the idea of God, or when one approaches a saintly person or a guru, then one tries to practise devotion. Although one may call it devotion, at that time it is *prem*, not devotion. The preliminary form of devotion is *prem*, love, and the ultimate form of love is devotion. That has to be practised through fixing the mind by certain attitudes.

What is the difference between devotion and emotion?

Swami Satyananda: Devotion means fusion of the various aspects and attitudes of love, the totality of emotion, in a focused manner. Devotion is not only an emotion; it is the merging of every emotion into a homogenous idea.

In classical Indian philosophy, bhakti is supposed to be the quickest means for sensory withdrawal. Bhakti is devotion, not emotion, and sensory withdrawal takes place through devotion, not through emotion. Emotions always disturb the mental structure and as a result withdrawal of the senses becomes difficult. Therefore, in practising devotion the emotional attitudes must be properly channelled, and then they are called bhakti or devotion. When bhakti is practised, withdrawal of the senses takes place automatically. According to the Indian way of thinking, attachment to things which are not eternal is emotion, and attachment to things which are eternal is devotion.

How can one tell the difference between ego-centred love and selfless devotion?_

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti implies that one feels devotion. From this comes effacement of ego and from this comes expanded awareness. Usually love and devotion are associated with and dependent on reciprocation; one loves and expects love in return. This is ego-centred love, not bhakti. Bhakti is love that expects no return. Bhakti means not taking, but giving. As one treads the path of bhakti yoga, self-interest automatically starts to fade. There is a transformation into giving and more giving.

Devotion increases as the awareness of the bhakta increases, as he recognizes and progressively removes his limitations and imperfections. The feeling of bhakti is intensified and the level of awareness is correspondingly intensified. The greater the level of bhakti, the less the ego.

What is the process that transforms emotion into devotion?

Swami Satyananda: As one evolves one becomes aware of higher forms of emotions and learns to seek their fulfilment. At a certain stage, one is aware of brotherly, platonic, paternal and marital love. For the fulfilment of these needs, different people come into one's life – mother, father, brother, sister, friend, lover, son and daughter. However, there comes a point in life when not emotion but devotion wakes up in a person. Devotion is a refined state of emotional love. The word devotion is preferable to the word love. Emotion, when sublimated and transformed, attains a state of metamorphosis which is called devotion.

In the course of evolution, when devotion becomes full one goes in search of someone to whom one can give that devotion. When one is five or six, one runs after friends. At fifteen or sixteen, one develops a certain type of emotional yearning and goes in search of a boyfriend or girlfriend to fulfil it. The search is the same with other forms of fulfilment in life, but the awareness of one's need is different. If that need is not fulfilled, there is a type of panic in the

personality. With the evolution of human consciousness the emotions go through a state of metamorphosis and transformation, until they reach a stage when something else is needed to fulfil them. At that time the guru becomes a need in one's life, as much as a boy or girl was a need when a teenager, or a friend was a need when a child.

Does devotion arise from experience and evolution?

Swami Satyananda: Devotion is the concentrated form of all shades of emotion. Emotion is one force, but it has many channels. Some flow towards other people, objects, ambitions and affairs in life. When emotions attain the sublime they unite to form one force, just as many small streams converge to form a large river. Devotion is all the different channels of emotion fused into one, and that is why devotion is said to be an all-consuming force. Once devotion is developed, all forms of emotion are consumed. It is said that guru is father, husband, wife, mother, brother, friend and teacher, for in him the totality of emotions is consumed.

When devotion awakens, the universe appears to be infinite and vast and one finds that one is all alone. One does not know where one came from or where one is going. This is a psychic experience in one's life. However, devotion to guru does not arise due to insecurity or loneliness, but when one realizes the limitations of all other forms of fulfilment in life.

Other fulfilments are subject to certain conditions related to time, space and object. They have a beginning and an end; they are ever-changing and often end in frustration and disgust. Before they are fulfilled, there is a lot of excitement, passion, restlessness and anxiety. After the moments of enjoyment, they leave behind a lot of guilt. This is what man becomes aware of in the course of time. The relationship between guru and disciple is of a higher kind and until one becomes aware of that need in one's life, the relationship with guru cannot be on the level of devotion.

Devotion and divine love are the same. When one loves anything of this world with passion, one's total being is

directed towards the attainment of that aim, whether it is money, power, men, women or any other object. Often one completely forgets oneself for the achievement of that aim; everything else becomes secondary and insignificant. Running after worldly objects is delusion of the mind.

When the mind is directed to guru with devotion, the consciousness is completely saturated and totally overpowered by the consciousness of guru or God, and then there comes a moment in one's life when this duality of consciousness leaves, and there is a state of non-duality of consciousness. This unity of awareness is the ultimate aim to be achieved by the guru-disciple relationship.

What is the ultimate sadhana in life?

Swami Satyananda: The ultimate point in life is God-consciousness. One may have everything – intellect, money, power, beauty, but without devotion life is barren. Devotion to God is the ultimate sadhana. Yoga is not the ultimate sadhana; yoga prepares the road. Just as a road roller prepares smooth roads for cars to drive on, yoga prepares inroads for the mind. Devotion is not going to a temple or a church to pray. Devotion is love and romance with God. The mind is dancing with God. He is my lover, my beloved. I am female, He is male; He is my husband; He is everything to me. That attitude must come. When all the passions are transformed, there will be no passion for anything except Him.

How can single-minded dedication for the Divine be described?

Swami Sivananda: The characteristics of a devotee who has attained the realization of oneness are described in the *Bhagavad Gita* (9:34):

*Manmanaa bhava madbhakto madyaajee maam namaskuru;
Maamevaishyasi yuktvaivamaatmaanam matparaayanah.*

Fix your mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice unto Me; bow down to Me; having thus united your whole

self with Me, taking Me as the Supreme Goal, you shall verily come unto Me.

The devotee constantly thinks of God. His very life is absorbed in Him. He has consecrated his whole life to the Divine. According to another interpretation, all his senses which function because of the prana, such as the eyes, are absorbed in Him. He takes immense delight in talking about Him, about His supreme wisdom, power, might and other attributes. He has completely dedicated himself to God. He feels intense satisfaction and is delighted as if he is in the company of his beloved God. In another verse (11:54) Sri Krishna tells Arjuna:

*Bhaktiyaa tvananyayaa shakya ahamevamvidho'rjuna;
Jnaatum drashtum cha tattvena praveshtum cha parantapa.*

But by single-minded devotion can I, of this Form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna.

Devotion is the sole means to realization of the Cosmic Form. *Ananya bhakti* is single-minded devotion, one-pointed, unbroken devotion which does not seek any other object but God alone. In this type of devotion no object other than God is experienced by any of the senses. Egoism and dualism totally vanish. 'Of this Form' refers to the Cosmic Form. By single-minded devotion it is possible not only to know Me, as declared in the scriptures, but also to realize Me, which means to attain liberation. The devotee realizes that God is all this and He alone is the Ultimate Reality. When he has this experience of illumination he becomes merged in Him.

There is no knowledge without devotion. Devotion is the flower and knowledge is the fruit. Knowledge is an effervescence of devotion. Without knowledge there can be no faith. Without faith there will be no attachment to God. Without attachment to God, *bhakti* cannot endure. Suppression or extinction of feelings or emotions cannot

cultivate devotion. One can churn butter out of water and extract oil out of sand, but without devotion one cannot cross over the ocean of births and deaths.

Are the bhakta and God inseparable?

Swami Sivananda: There is no difference between God and His devotee. Just as a river loses its name and form after it has entered the ocean, so also a devotee loses his individuality when he merges himself in God. The mind that causes distinction is annihilated by devotion. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:55) it is said:

*Bhaktiyaa maamabhijaanaati yaavaanyashchaasmi tattvatah;
Tato maam tattvato jnaatvaa vishate tadanantaram.*

By devotion he knows Me in truth, what and who I am; then having known Me in truth, he forthwith enters into the Supreme.

Sri Krishna explains: devotion culminates in knowledge. Devotion begins with two and ends in one. *Para bhakti*, supreme devotion, and *jnana*, wisdom, are one. Devotion is the mother, knowledge is the son. By devotion he knows that I am all-pervading consciousness; he knows that I am non-dual, unborn, decayless, causeless, self-luminous, indivisible, unchanging; he knows that I am destitute of all the differences caused by the limiting adjuncts; he knows that I am the support, source, womb, basis and substratum of everything; he knows that I am the ruler of all beings; he knows that I am the Supreme Purusha, the controller of Maya and that this world is a mere appearance. Thus knowing Me in truth or in essence, he enters into Me soon after attaining Self-knowledge.

What is a bhakta's experience of this knowledge of the Self?

Swami Sivananda: Those devotees who have dedicated themselves to God, who are ever harmonious and self-abiding, who are ever devout and who adore Him with

intense love (not for attaining any selfish purpose), obtain the divine grace. God gives them wisdom or the yoga of discrimination or understanding by which they attain the knowledge of the Self. God bestows on these devotees who have fixed their thought on Him alone, devotion or right knowledge, or *buddhi yoga*, by which they know Him in essence. They know through the eye of intuition in deep meditation the Supreme, the One in all, the Self of all, as their own Self, destitute of all limitations. Buddhi here is the inner eye of intuition by which the magnificent experience of oneness is had. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (10:10–11):

*Teshaam satatayuktaanaam bhajataam preetipoorvakam;
Dadaami buddhiyogam tam yena maamupayaanti te.*

*Teshaamevaanukamparthamahamajnaanajam tamah;
Naashayaamyatmabhaavastho jnaanadeepena bhaasvataa.*

To them who are ever steadfast, worshipping Me with love, I give the yoga of discrimination by which they come to Me.

Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling within their Self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous lamp of knowledge. (10–11)

‘Luminous lamp of knowledge’ means that God dwells in the heart of those devotees who constantly think of Him, and destroys the veil or the darkness born of ignorance due to the absence of discrimination, by the luminous lamp of knowledge fed by the oil of pure devotion, fanned by the wind of profound meditation on Him, provided with the wick of right intuition, generated by the constant cultivation of celibacy, piety and other divine virtues held in the chambers of the heart free from worldliness, placed in the innermost recesses of the mind free from the wind of sense-attractions (withdrawn from the objects of the senses), and untainted by likes and dislikes, and shining with the

light of knowledge of the Self caused by constant practice of meditation.

He who has controlled his mind and organs, who has the knowledge of the field and the knowable and who fixes his mind on Me becomes one with Me. He who has single-minded devotion unto Me, who takes Me, Vasudeva, the Supreme, the omniscient and the supreme Guru, as the Self of everything, he who thinks and feels that all that he sees, hears and touches is nothing but God and he who has the right knowledge described above enters into My Being or attains release from birth and death. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:18):

*Iti kshetram tathaa jnaanam jneyam choktam samaasatah;
Madbhakta etadvijnaaya madbhaavaayopapadyate.*

Thus the field as well as knowledge and the knowable have been briefly stated. My devotee, knowing this, enters into My Being.

Sri Krishna advises: Fill thy mind with Me. Fix the head, heart and hands on Me. Have the heart in tune with Me. Become a true worshipper and eternal bliss will be secured. Having known Me one will cross beyond death.

Man's whole being should be surrendered to the Divine without reservation, and then the whole life will undergo a wonderful transformation. One will have the vision of God everywhere. All sorrows and pains will vanish. The mind will be one with divine consciousness.

Just as the pot-ether becomes one with the universal ether when the limiting adjunct, the pot, is broken, just as the Ganga and the Yamuna, leaving their names and forms become one with the ocean, so also the sage gets rid of *avidya*, ignorance, and all sorts of limiting adjuncts through direct realization of the Self and becomes identical with Para Brahman.

SRI LAKSHMAN



Though Sri Lakshman is considered to be one of the four forms of Sri Rama's energy, Valmiki said that he was an avatar of Sheshnag. The only purpose of Sri Lakshman's life was dedicating himself to the service of Sri Rama. From the cradle itself he was devoted to Rama. When they were in Rishi Vishwasmitra's ashram to protect the yajnas from demons, Lakshman served Rama personally and took care of all his needs.

He was loving and gentle at heart but if he felt that Sri Rama was being slighted or treated unfairly, he felt great indignation and then there was no one more furious than Lakshman.

He was upset with King Janaka during the contest to string Shiva's bow when Janaka said that there were no brave men left on earth who could even lift the bow of Shiva. Lakshman thought that was an insult to Rama's strength. He even took on Parashuram's wrath and challenged him to a battle for mocking Sri Rama.

Lakshman was angry at the unfair exile pronounced upon Sri Rama by Kaikeyi and their father Dasharatha. Though Sri Rama advised Lakshman to stay back in the palace and carry out his duties there, Lakshman was mortified at being separated from Sri Rama and begged to accompany him and Sita into the forest. When Sri Rama conceded, Lakshman gladly abandoned the palace and its comforts and left to brave the harsh life in the forest, serving Sri Rama and Sita.

His devotion and service to Sri Rama helped him gain victory over the desires of hunger, thirst, sleep and rest. He was ever alert to the needs of his brother and wife and was deeply respectful towards them. Lakshman looked for water, fruits, roots, flowers and other offerings for pooja, built huts for them and kept watch through the night with unswerving devotion and joy.

The vow of brahmacharya and restraint that Lakshman took and lived out perfectly was praiseworthy indeed. It was the power he received from this vow that helped him defeat Meghanand during the battle in Lanka.

After her abduction by Ravana, Lakshman was shown Sita's ornaments which had been found in the forest. He could only identify her anklets, as for all those years his gaze had never travelled beyond her feet! Such was his fidelity and adherence to propriety and etiquette; such was his great respect for Sita.

At Sri Rama's order, he was able to perform the most difficult task, namely leaving Sita in the forest, a task that both Bharat and Shatrughna had flatly refused to do. Placing a stone upon his heart, he escorted Sita into the forest and left her there because it was Sri Rama's command.

Years later, Sri Rama was engaged in a private conversation with Kaal and had declared that anyone intruding upon them would pay with their life. Lakshman was put on guard outside the door. Rishi Durvasa arrived there and insisted that he be shown in to meet Sri Rama immediately or else he would place a terrible curse on the entire dynasty. Lakshman was compelled to break Sri Rama's order and enter to announce Rishi Durvasa's presence there. After Rishi Durvasa had left, Sri Rama was very sad, for according to his order, Lakshman had to be given the death penalty for disturbing him. To prevent Sri Rama from carrying out this difficult act, Lakshman voluntarily went into exile; the exile of a loved one is equated to his death and thus he spared Sri Rama from the dishonour of not keeping his word. Such was the depth of Lakshman's devotion to Sri Rama.

DEVELOPING DEVOTION

What is the first step in developing devotion?

Swami Satyananda: To convert sentiments into devotion, first let the intellect retire – suspend it, dismiss it. In spiritual life, reasoning, arguments and intellect do not work because the search is for something unseen, for which there is no proof. There is no chart saying, “Go this way.” There is no timetable, no way is known. Is God a woman or a man? Is God a man or an animal? Is God there or not? If it is void, what is void? If it is *nirguna*, without qualities, what does that mean? God is not the subject of argument or intellect. God is the subject of emotion, which changes into devotion. Highest love is the form of devotion. Bhakti is not love, it is highest love.

Where does the ego fit into this expression of love?

Swami Satyananda: How can devotion and ego ever go together? One loves someone only when one forgets oneself, when one has no ego. If one still holds onto one’s ego, one cannot say, “I am yours.” One can only say, “I am my own.” When I say, “I am yours,” it means that I have given myself over and accepted yourself as my own. So there can be no ego in devotion. As long as the ego remains, there can be no devotion.

When I was there, Hari was not.

And now, when Hari is there, I am not.

Kabirdas has made this clear. The lamp and the flame become one. The ‘I’ or ego, and devotion cannot coexist; it is a reverse Ganga. Love is to be given to others, not extracted from others. Love is its own reward. There is no difference between love and devotion in bhakti.

To develop devotion, how should one relate to God?

Swami Satyananda: The *bhavas* or feelings of a human being come from the depths of the heart. One should relate to God with all of one’s sincerity and truth, from the heart,

because one is talking to somebody who is no different, who is one's own being. One is talking to oneself, so be sincere because one can cheat the whole world, but not oneself. God is within one and He knows very well what one is thinking, rationalizing and feeling, whatever one is. Or maybe that is all happening because He is doing it. Who knows, maybe He knows whatever you and I are feeling and thinking because He is everything in life.

What is the process of developing devotion?

Swami Satyananda: In the human incarnation devotion is developed gradually. Throughout the soul's evolution, gradual training is imparted to develop devotion. To make a pot, first the correct earth is collected, then it is moulded or given a shape on a revolving wheel, then it is baked, glazed and painted and the pot is ready.

In the same way, first emotion, attachment and love have to be developed for the various people in this world. After love and attachment have been developed for people in this world, they should be transformed or channelled. There are two channels for emotion: the empirical channel and the spiritual channel. In the spiritual channel, the first step to devotion is to have satsang, to hear the stories of saints. The second step is to have association with saints. The third step is to find a guru. Finally, when one's devotion has reached a climax, one has devotion to God. Devotion, therefore, should be developed step by step.

What is your advice for those who feel they have a devotional nature?

Swami Satyananda: Those people who have some form of devotion or belief should definitely follow the path of bhakti because of their very personality. They may lack any form of higher experience, but they spontaneously feel devotion towards something. Such people should direct their emotion towards the object of devotion. For them, bhakti yoga can be the express train to expanded awareness.

How does one know what to be devoted to?

Swami Satyananda: One has to be honest with oneself. If one has to sit down and think, “What shall I be devoted to?” then this is a sure sign that one does not really have an object of devotion. There should be no need to sit down and ask oneself the question. If one feels devotion for something, one will know. There will be no doubt – the heart will immediately tell which object captivates one’s bhakti. If strong devotion is felt for one thing, without doubt, bhakti is one’s path. If there is no overwhelming devotion for something, at this stage bhakti is not for one. Under these circumstances, bhakti yoga will probably lead to mere ritual and self-deception, rather than transcendence. With the practice of other types of yoga, bhakti will come in the future.

When one has a guru is one instantly attuned to God?

Swami Satyananda: In most people the flow of bhakti is dissipated. Loving one’s brother, friend or child is emotion, loving a man, one’s father or mother is emotion, and loving one’s property, wealth and material possessions is also emotion. The emotions are dissipated in this way. If one can cut off completely from everything else, then one can connect oneself with God or guru.

Often people think of devotion to God and express their feeling, but it is all intellectual for that devotion does not help them to transcend the mind. When true devotion dawns in the mind, this lower self is lost immediately. If one is anaesthetized, one loses consciousness of touch, but if that consciousness is not lost, it means there was something wrong with the anaesthetic. In the same way, when one expresses one’s devotion to God but does not transcend the mind, it means it was not true. Know that bhakti, or devotion to God, is so powerful that if it comes into the mind for a split second, everything else is forgotten.

If I hold your nose and try to strangle you, you will fight desperately for your life. That kind of anxiety and desperation to live that is experienced is akin to the degree

of devotion necessary to materialize God or guru. If I ask a real bhakta or devotee to follow me like a dog, he won't think first and decide whether this is good or bad. The mind will be one-pointed. It is due to the depth and intensity of one's bhakti that one can make the guru or God manifest.

How are shaktipat and bhakti connected?

Swami Niranjanananda: One aspect of shaktipat is bhakti, devotion, which exists between guru and disciple. Even though Swami Sivananda only saw his guru once, maybe for half an hour or so, he was always a disciple. He never claimed to be a self-made person. He lived with affection and devotion for his guru. Sri Swami Satyananda always considered himself to be a disciple, and if you spoke to him about Swami Sivananda his whole being began to radiate with love and affection, which he experienced deep within his heart. This is an intimate and pure inner feeling.

In the absence of devotion I do not think shaktipat can take place. Devotion is not sitting glassy-eyed in front of the master and saying how great he is, no! Devotion is the connection of two hearts, when the bodies are two, but the spirit is one. When the directions may be two, but the mind one, this is bhakti. This is devotion.

How intense does devotion need to be to experience God?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one is hungry, when the stomach is empty, when the pangs of hunger are beginning to influence the body, then there is no awareness. The experience of hunger becomes the prominent experience. Even sitting in a movie theatre watching a nice movie, the hunger will make one get up, leave the movie, go buy something to eat and then come back – the urge to eat is so strong.

There is a story about a devotee of Ramakrishna Paramahansa who begged to receive darshan of Ma Kali. This devotee said to Ramakrishna Paramahansa, "You are always in communion with Ma, so please tell Her that a devotee of Hers has been desperate for many days to have darshan

and that She must grant this wish. If you say so, She will surely agree.” Ramakrishna Paramahansa said nothing in response, but instead headed down to the river with his towel over his shoulder for a bath. The devotee followed him there and, standing on the riverbank, he pleaded with Ramakrishna Paramahansa to intercede with Ma so She would grant him Her darshan.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa said to him, “Come and take a dip first. Have a bath with me here in the river.” The devotee was delighted at this rare opportunity to take a bath with a saint, so he promptly went into the river. When he got near, Ramakrishna Paramahansa climbed up on to his shoulders and pushed his head under the water. He held the man’s head down, not just for a few seconds, but until such time that he was unable to breathe. In desperation, with the lungs filling up with water and the arms flailing all about, the man mustered up all his strength and pushed Ramakrishna Paramahansa away from his shoulders.

When the devotee was finally able to come out of the water and breathe again, he was confounded by this action. He asked Ramakrishna Paramahansa, “Why did you do this? Were you trying to kill me or what?” Ramakrishna Paramahansa said, “I was interested in knowing exactly how desperate is your desire to have darshan of Ma. Your desire to live is surely strong because you did all you could to throw me off and save yourself from drowning. When your desire for Ma’s darshan is as strong and intense as your desire to live, when your desperation reaches such a state that you cannot live in the world another moment more and you beg for liberation, beg to be taken out of this river of life, then Ma Herself will come to you. The intensity has to be immense.”

What kind of focus is necessary to develop intense concentration?

Swami Satyananda: It is overwhelming devotion to one’s deity or guru. The greater the aspiration, the quicker one is likely

to transcend and the quicker one is likely to come face to face with something beyond everyday experience.

There must be an intense quest; there has to be aspiration. According to Swami Ramdas, "Unless one has a burning aspiration for the Supreme, the mind cannot be fixed on him. Where one's love is, there one's mind also is. Just as the miser constantly thinks of money and money alone, so a bhakta has exclusive devotion to the Supreme."

This is the way to expanded awareness. One must try to act, feel and think while being aware of divinity, the deity or the guru. Always know that it is divinity that makes one feel, do and think. One is not the doer. This recollection will reduce the hold and the power of the ego. This is called surrender, and it is the way to higher states of consciousness.

Is there a method to lose oneself in the awareness of divinity?

Swami Satyananda: There was a great saint in Iran many centuries ago, named Omar Khayam, who wrote romantic poetry. He wrote a poem, *Rubaiyat*, about a pitcher of wine and a young girl beside him. It is apparently erotic but it has a deep meaning. The pitcher of wine represents the state of intoxication. When one drinks a lot of wine one forgets oneself and when one goes deep into meditation, one also forgets oneself. When one takes one or two puffs of a chillum one forgets oneself. So, the pitcher of wine represents transcending oneself and the girl represents constant awareness.

Just as the consciousness is totally merged in the company of a young man or a young woman, in her beauty and tenderness, exactly that happens in spiritual life. When a boy is in the company of a girl, he does not have to force his mind on her; it is spontaneous. In the same way, awareness of atma or the Self has to be spontaneous. What Omar Khayam has written is beautiful: My beloved is inside me. Let me just be inside and see her. It means one turns one's gaze inside, the mind, and there He is.

How does the devotee experience closeness to God?

Swami Sivananda: It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:10):

*Mayi chaananyayogena bhaktiravyabhicharinee;
Viviktadeshasevitvamaratirjanasamsadi.*

Unswerving devotion unto Me by the yoga of non-separation, resort to solitary places and distaste for the society of men.

Just as a river, when it merges itself in the ocean, becomes completely one with it, even so he, being united with Me, worships only Me. This is ananya yoga or *aprithak samadhi*, yoga of non-separation, or the superconscious state in which the devotee feels that he is non-distinct from God. Such devotion is a means of attaining knowledge. Such a devotee will never give up his devotion and worship even when he is under great trials and adversities.

Viviktadesasevitvam means he lives on the banks of sacred rivers, in caves, in the mountains, on the shores of seas or lakes and in beautiful solitary gardens where there is no fear of serpents, tigers or thieves. In solitary places the mind is quite calm for there are no disturbing elements that can distract the attention. One can have uninterrupted meditation on the Self and enter into samadhi quickly.

There is distaste for the society of worldly-minded people, not of the wise, pure and holy. *Satsang* or association with the wise is a means to the attainment of the knowledge of the Self.

How does one achieve supreme devotion?

Swami Satyananda: I do not know. And never mind me, no one knows! Even as the chatak bird always keeps his beak open, waiting for the raindrops of *swati nakshatra* (one of the 27 constellations in a year) to fall into it, you must keep your heart forever open. Maybe the drops of God's grace will one day descend upon you.

Sri Swamiji, why didn't you cultivate devotion earlier in your life?

Swami Satyananda: The greatest problem was devotion for whom. I can't have devotion for a god whom I don't even know. Fortunately or unfortunately, from the beginning of my life as soon as I could think I began to have disbelief in all religion. I don't believe that there is a person who is religious because I think, "No, what do they know about God? They tailor the qualities of God to suit their religious structure." The Greeks started thinking about some personal gods somewhere in the atmosphere, stratosphere, maybe on some other planet, in another solar system. The Hindus began to think that God was somewhere inside and some thought that God was in that mountain and that mountain.

One day I just stopped reading all these stories. I said it is better not to think about God. Now whether I believe in God or not, one thing was certain, I needed someone to whom I should have devotion. That remained my problem for many, many years. I had been to many great saints during my childhood also, but I did not know how to express my devotion or how to feel the devotion for them. I tried music, dance, painting, everything. The problem was simply that I did not find the right person. Perhaps the people whom I met at that time did not fit into my idiotic frame, and I also did not know what I was expecting of them. Did I expect some sort of good intellectual education from them or did I expect some sort of magic and miracles from them, *siddhis*? I myself was not clear and therefore my search for bhakti did not yield any result at all.

God was out of the question. I thought, "If the God is in me I don't have to love him because he is the lover. If he controls my mind, my emotion and my body then let him control my devotion also and then I am not responsible." If I commit a crime, I am not responsible. If I get kaivalya samadhi I am not responsible, because they say, He does everything. If he does everything then where is my role and where is my place? If He decides everything, let him decide.

Then why am I blamed and why should I do sadhana at all? All these confusing intellectual cobwebs were in my mind.

Finally, when I came to my guru, Swami Sivananda, everything finished. I did not love him as you understand love. I did not look in his eyes all the time, like a Romeo. I did not even meet him every day, but I did have devotion for him, which I realized only years later. Therefore, one's total dedication of one's total emotion to someone without any intellectual intervention is bhakti.



4

Suffering and Sorrow – An Invitation of Grace

The wise ask God only for those things which are appropriate for their spiritual evolution, and not for the removal of suffering, disease or pain.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

THE EXPERIENCE OF PAIN

Does becoming a bhakta safeguard the devotee from suffering?

Swami Sivananda: The path of love is the razor's path, rugged, thorny and precipitous. It is also exceedingly narrow and can admit only one. When there is God, there is no 'I'. When there is 'I' there is no Lord. The aspirant walks on a thin wire just like an acrobat. If he is careless, he may trip at any moment and fall into the deep abyss below. Furthermore, Maya's sword is hanging above his neck. There are crocodiles in the deep abyss below, a big fire in front and scorpions and cobras behind. How courageous, then, the aspirant must be! But he is always supported by the invisible hands of the Unseen.

The nectar is ever flowing from the fountain of love within the chambers of the heart. The devotee drinks it and feels the warm embrace of the Lord at every step. That is the reason why he marches on the path with an

undaunted spirit. Without divine grace he cannot win the battle. Without His help and mercy, he cannot move an inch on the hazardous path. The devotee has to pass through dry wilderness and cyclonic storms, to cross many fierce foaming streams, ascend many precipitous peaks, steer clear of many whirlpools in the stormy sea of this life and patiently bear severe persecutions. There is no room for lamentation or despair even if there are a thousand and one difficulties. All will melt away if the aspirant is sincere and persistent, if he has iron determination and fiery resolve, if he is regular in his prayers and worship. Eventually through the grace of God the devotee or lover comes out victorious in his battle.

How does a bhakta understand suffering?

Swami Sivananda: A real devotee never complains against God. A raw bhakta speaks ill of God when he is in distress. He says, “I have done twenty-five lakhs of japa, I study the *Srimad Bhagavatam* daily, yet God is not pleased with me. He has not removed my sufferings. God is blind. He has not heard my prayers. What sort of God is Sri Krishna? I have no faith in Him.”

A real bhakta rejoices in suffering, pain and destitution. He always welcomes grief and sorrow, so that he may not forget God even for a second. He has the firm belief that God does everything for his good only. A real devotee will not ask God even for liberation. So long as the subtle desire for liberation lingers in the heart he cannot claim to be a true devotee of God. Though the desire for liberation is of sattwic nature, yet the devotee has become a slave of the desire for liberation. He is still selfish and so is unfit to call himself a sincere lover of God. He has not yet made total unreserved self-surrender. To ask for liberation is a variety of hypocrisy. Can a true devotee dare ask anything from God, when he fully knows that He is an ocean of love and compassion?

Why would an aspirant choose suffering over pleasure?

Swami Satyananda: Man has learned from experience that the mind is more attracted and attuned to sorrow than to happiness. Everyone knows about suffering and sorrow in society. Even sadhus and mahatmas experience suffering. In winter they remain naked. They immerse themselves in icy cold water. Don't they feel pain and suffering? Don't they feel cold? During summer, they sit in temperatures of sixty to seventy degrees Celsius. Don't they suffer? Yes, but they actually enjoy it because it is self-imposed pain. Man goes out of his way to impose pain on himself.

Even in the ashram my dream was to stay in seclusion, remove all my clothes, smear ash all over myself and beg for my food. All this five-star hotel business meant nothing to me. When I stayed in a five-star hotel, I used to sleep on a mat on the floor. Why? Suffering is a state which has a tremendous effect on the mind and emotions. If one can accept it, then this effect becomes a reality. Pain is the reality and happiness may be just a shadow. Sorrow is the reality, but everyone desires happiness. However, by understanding sorrow and converting it into a form of sadhana, the same sorrow becomes a source of happiness and the end result is extremely fulfilling.

In the past I could not bear the heat of summer in Munger and could not manage without a fan, because I was born in Almora, in northern India, where the temperature never rose above twenty-five degrees Celsius. Heat irritated me. Power cuts would become unbearable, so I had central air-conditioning installed. After coming to Rikhia, I started doing *Panchagni*, sadhana of five fires, because that was my sadhana, but I did not feel the heat as I used to in Munger. Now the heat is nothing because during the *Panchagni* sadhana I have sat in sixty to seventy degrees Celsius in comfort.

Why does sorrow have to be conquered?

Swami Satyananda: Sorrow has to be faced, and that sorrow results in joy. If one comes to terms with one's situation in life and makes an agreement with it, happiness will follow.

Neither death nor adversity will have any meaning. An Urdu poet has said that life and death are nothing but the soul changing its dress. Searching for happiness is like trying to catch hold of one's own shadow, which is impossible.

Sri Rama was an incarnation of God. He was the Lord of bliss and king of the world. Happiness was under his control, but he endured many years of suffering and hardship. Why didn't he enjoy the treasures of happiness at all times? For twelve years he lived with his guru and slept on the ground, and then, for fourteen years, he lived in the jungle, treading the path of thorns, which makes twenty-six years of suffering and hardship. The events that took place after this period were also painful. How much happiness did he enjoy? He was master of all events, so why didn't he alter the course of events in his own life to suit his convenience? When God did not change his situation in life, why should we change ours? Kabir has aptly remarked:

Pain is punishment for this body
And it comes to all.
The wise man bears it with fortitude,
The foolish man bears it weeping.

What is the way to manage suffering?

Swami Niranjanananda: Suffering and pleasure can help one advance in spiritual life and take one away from it. The entire process of spiritual life depends on one's attitude and awareness. Unfortunately, the human tendency is to not be aware of one's shortcomings and limitations during periods of pleasure and happiness. When pleasure and happiness are on the rise then the ego is also affected. There is no positive control over the expression of ego, often resulting in a superiority complex: I am superior because I am happy, I am content, I am satisfied and I am the master of circumstances and situations.

In a subtle way, this kind of idea and attitude affects the ego identity. However, when there is positive control

then pleasure becomes a tool for deepening one's spiritual experiences. This is the tantric and yogic view of pain and pleasure, suffering and enjoyment.

Suffering makes one aware of one's shortcomings and follies and creates a train of thought which impels questioning and analyzing: "What can I do to improve myself? What can I do to overcome this situation of suffering and pain?" These questions lead to the spiritual quest as one tries to discover, "Where have I gone wrong?" Suffering actually increases self-awareness. Practically everyone who has had spiritual experiences says that suffering increases awareness and improves behaviour and performance, thus acting as an aid to spiritual growth.

Suffering also needs positive control. If positive control is lacking, one can fall into states of depression, anxiety, frustration and thoughts of suicide. These states are not conducive to spiritual development. Therefore, one should try to maintain more positive control in one's personality. One will notice that in times of suffering or happiness, one will cease to have the depressing or elevating experience, and be able to maintain balance all the way through. Hence, it is not just suffering that is conducive to spiritual development, it is also positive control.

How can suffering be dealt with?

Swami Satyananda: In the course of life, a person may be afflicted with many different kinds of suffering due to pain, disease, death, poverty, wealth, loss of friends, ill-repute and so on. In such situations a way must be found to absorb the mind in another subject where it dissolves totally. Ramakrishna Paramahansa had cancer, Adi Shankaracharya had fistula, Ramana Maharshi had piles and Swami Vivekananda had diabetes. How did they all deal with these sufferings? By identifying themselves with God, Brahman or Atman, and not with disease and suffering. Therefore, the wise ask God only for those things which are appropriate for their spiritual evolution, and not for the removal of suffering, disease or pain.

Why are pain and adversity essential to the bhakti path?

Swami Sivananda: When serious trouble or disease strikes, one must thank God at once from the bottom of one's heart. Pain is a blessing in disguise, for a bad karma is thereby purged and one will evolve quickly. One can proceed now with safety, with a line-clear ticket on the spiritual path. Further, this suffering will augment one's power of endurance, mercy and faith in God, and remove lurking egoism.

Shakespeare said, "Sweet are the uses of adversity which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet on its head a precious jewel." The best thing in this world is pain or adversity because only during pain does man remember God. Pain is the eye-opener. The quest for God begins from pain. The starting point of philosophy is from pain. Had there been no pain in this world, man would never have attempted to attain *moksha*, liberation, and would have been satisfied with mundane life only. In trying to get rid of pain, he comes across Truth or the abode of peace. He begins to pray, do japa, selfless service, study spiritual books. Bhaktas always pray to God, "O God! Give us suffering always so that we shall ever remember You."

How does suffering help to increase devotion?

Swami Satyananda: After the Mahabharata war was over, Krishna was returning from Kurukshetra, the battlefield, to Dwarika, his city. Kunti, mother of the Pandava brothers who were the victors in this war, also happened to be Krishna's paternal aunt. She began pleading with him not to leave. "The war is over," replied Krishna "I have helped your sons win the war, but now my duty is over and I am going home." "No!" she said emphatically, "Now that my children have won the war, it is a day of rejoicing and happiness, and you are leaving? No! O Lord, give us pain so that you are always in our hearts."

When there is pain, God is remembered. God is there when there is pain and distress, when everything is loaded

against one. Kunti's prayer shows that at any cost, whether in pain or pleasure, distress or comfort, God should never be forgotten. That same love, emotion, devotion and surrender should remain with God. Love for God should not change according to life's situations. Love for God should be eternal. It should be the flag of one's life flying high all the time – during cyclones and during clear weather.

How does Shiva define suffering in the Shiva Purana?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is suffering in everyone's life. In the scriptures, three types of sufferings are defined: *adhidaivika*, suffering due to natural causes; *adhibhautika*, suffering due to external causes; and *adhyatmika*, suffering due to one's own internal causes. Mental suffering leads to mental disease. Anger, jealousy and hatred are all mental diseases; they are all distorted states of the mind that make a person suffer. Jealousy and hatred make the mind sick, attachment weakens the mind, and repulsion brings out the negativities of the mind. All these come under the category of mental sickness, just like diabetes, arthritis and asthma are physical diseases.

Other than these three types of suffering, Shiva talks to Sati about five other sufferings: those of the womb, birth, ignorance, old age and death. The suffering of the womb is experienced when a soul enters the confined space of the womb and his potential becomes restricted. He loses his infinite nature and sees himself only as a limited being.

The suffering of birth is experienced when the soul enters the world and his senses become active. He starts breathing and connects with the outside world. At this moment, he realizes that when a connection is made with the world, he will forget his divine origin and look in the opposite direction.

The suffering of ignorance is experienced when, as a result of ego, one forgets the infinite self and identifies with the limited self; when one is influenced by the external circumstances and breaks down due to their overload.

The suffering of old age comes when the senses weaken and the energy levels decrease. Lastly, of course, there is the suffering of death. A person becomes so attached to this world, he thinks that this world is everything. While leaving this world, he fondly remembers his children and remains attached to them. At that time, he forgets that he is now leaving to merge with his ishta. He fails to realize that death is also the grace of God. Death is not a punishment, it is grace from God. Nonetheless, a person lives in constant fear of these five types of suffering.

How does Shiva describe the way to end suffering?

Swami Niranjanananda: Mother Sati then asked, “God, what needs to be done?” Shiva said, *Sarva dukhaa poho dukhaanta* – “Suffering also has its end.” You have to make an effort to end the suffering. Only when the suffering ends can you realize the ultimate reality. The end to suffering is of two kinds: *anatmaka* and *satmaka*. *Anatmaka* means the end of all *kleshas* or afflictions. *Satmaka* means that, along with the end of all *kleshas*, there is also attainment of *bhakti* and *jnana*.

Everyone tries to get rid of their suffering. At the same time they go on increasing their desires and trying to satisfy them. Nobody wants an end to their desires. People want an end to their suffering so that they can go on performing their *karmas* for the fulfilment of desires. This attitude is called *anatmaka*. In the *satmaka* end to suffering, along with the end of suffering, there is attainment of *shraddha* or faith, *bhakti* to God, love and affection. The feeling comes: *Naham karta, Hari karta, Hari karta hi kevalam* – “I am not the doer; Hari or God is the doer and I am only a medium.” Once one has this feeling then one can free oneself from the tensions of *karma* and evolve *bhakti* and *shraddha*.

Bhakti should be the primary *anushthana* or spiritual practice. In this world, it is necessary that one be involved in the transactions of the senses, and so one should never look at this negatively. It is God-given. He has created the system

that when one comes into this world, one becomes involved in the transactions of the senses. When one goes to a shop, one looks at the goodies. One does not meditate in a shop. Therefore, continue to transact business with the senses. In the *Ishavasya Upanishad* it is said (v. 1):

*Om eeshaa vaasyam idam sarvam, yat kincha jagatyaam jagat;
Tena tyaktena bhunjeethaa maa gridhah kasyasvid dhanam.*

The world is permeated by Him and everything is His; therefore, enjoy everything without being greedy towards the wealth of others.

One should enjoy and experience life, yet at the same time make a place in life for this anushthana of bhakti, so that one is freed from the afflictions and kleshas and reaches God. Liberation or *mukti* is the freedom from kleshas and suffering and the attainment of *aishvarya*, the inner wealth of God.

Why is adversity a boon to the spiritual aspirant?

Swami Sivananda: Adversity develops endurance and will-power, fortitude and forbearance. It melts a stony heart and infuses the aspirant with devotion to God. Therefore, one should not be afraid when in adverse circumstances, as adversity has its own virtues. People have risen to power and position from adverse conditions. Adversity makes a person struggle hard.

The late Sir T. Muthuswami Iyer, Chief Justice of the High Court of Madras, was in adverse circumstances. He used to study at night under a street lantern. Many English prime ministers rose from adverse conditions. All the prophets, saints, fakirs, bhaktas and yogis of yore had to struggle hard in adverse circumstances. Adi Shankaracharya, Jnandeva, Rama Tirtha and Tukaram benefited highly from being placed in adverse circumstances, and would never have achieved greatness and glorious spiritual heights had they been placed in luxurious conditions.

How does the grace of God appear to the beleaguered devotee?

Swami Sivananda: How courageously a person who knows fencing acts when he is pelted by stones on all sides. He wards off each stone very dexterously and protects himself in a marvellous manner. Even so, the devotee must be bold when he treads the path of love. God will appear only when the devotee has abandoned the least tinge or trace of egoism, when he has made complete self-surrender. He will be tested in a variety of ways. When Draupadi fully relied on the help of God, and when she totally placed herself at the feet of Sri Krishna, the Lord of Dwarika came to her rescue immediately and multiplied her clothes.

Mirabai had to undergo fiery ordeals before she entered the portals of the region of supreme love where her beloved Krishna reigned in supreme splendour and glory. She underwent persecutions of all sorts. She walked barefooted on the burning sands of Rajputana, lived on alms, slept on the ground and fasted continuously. In spite of these ordeals she was always in rapturous delight through the grace of God.

For Prahlada, divine grace converted fire into ice. Burning oil was like cool sandal wood oil for him. Through the grace of Giridhari Gopal, Krishna the cobra was converted into an idol of Krishna, a shaligram and a garland of flowers. For Mira, poison was changed into nectar and a bed of sharp nails into a bed of roses. God's grace makes a dumb man eloquent and a lame man ascend the highest peaks of the Himalayas.

How does adversity deepen bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Strangely enough, anguish can intensify bhakti. Distress and torment at being separated from divine communion can lead to an upsurge of bhakti and heightened awareness, but this anguish must come from the very depths of one's being. Dissatisfaction leads to this intensification. The bhakta accepts all that comes as a gift intended

to lift him into the deeper realms of awareness. Whether it is anguish, joy or whatever, it is all intended to raise the bhakta's level of awareness, to speed him along the path to higher knowledge. One must also feel the pain of separation and have the same intense longing for union that the Gopis felt for Krishna. This is one-pointed bhakti.

Pain and suffering have to be accepted. Don't be afraid of pain. Don't depend on worldly things, or riches. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." One should not depend on wealth as one's security in life. Real security is purification.

What happens to personal ego in bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Many saints have completely lost their personal ego at the height of bhakti. There was a saint in the Middle East named Mansoor. He was a great devotee of God, but people were not happy with him so he was brought for execution. His skin was peeled off, like peeling the skin from a potato, but still he had no pain. He only repeated the name of Truth. He was intoxicated with bhakti.

This intoxication with bhakti cannot be understood. Prayers are ritualistic and most people's devotion or feeling is also very superficial. Remember that just as the passion for a man or a woman makes one transcend the ego, devotion should also make one transcend the ego.

SACRIFICE AND RENUNCIATION

What does sacrifice mean in relation to surrendering to God?

Swami Satyananda: There comes a point when the servant has to sacrifice his personal choice. I want God to direct me to do something which I like, but if He tells me to do something I do not like, and still I do it according to His wishes, it is called sacrifice. Supposing He were to say to me, "Satyananda, why don't you marry this girl? She will make

a very nice wife. She will serve you and wash your clothes.” Then I would reply, “My God! Why are you telling me this now? I am seventy-five years old and now you are asking me to marry, which is a heavy responsibility even for a young man of twenty-five!” This is not a correct attitude. I would have to sacrifice my wishes because He wants it. My personal discomfort, displeasure and difficulties do not count here at all. To elucidate this, Kabirdas has said:

Even if you offer your body and wealth,
It is very difficult to surrender the mind.

How can one rely on such a servant who, in the opinion of Kabir, is not worth much?

In addition to the body and mind, what else does one sacrifice to God?

Swami Satyananda: Sacrifice may be painful, but it is the fulfilment of one’s promise. The fulfilment of God’s command is called sacrifice. It may pinch the body, the flesh, but it doesn’t matter because it gives the ultimate pleasure, which lies only in fulfilling His order and command. One has to sacrifice step by step, first the body, then the mind, then the emotions and feelings and finally the spirit. Sacrificing the spirit means that even the concept and the desire for moksha, to be near God, even the wish to have the blessings of God, even the desire to have something to do with Him, has to be broken down.

The correct attitude, therefore, is: “I don’t want anything, not even You. You are my master and I will always think about You and be with You. Today it doesn’t matter if You don’t come to me.” Similarly, in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Vritrasur says to the Lord (6:11:25–27):

*Na naakaprishtham na cha paarameshthyam na
saarvabhaumam na rasaadhipatyam.
Na yogasiddheerapunarbhavam vaa samanajasa tvaa
virahayya kaankshe.*

*Ajaatapakshaa iva maataram khagaah stanyam yathaa
vatsataraah kshudhaartaah.
Priyam priyeva vyushitam vishannaa mano'raavindaaksha
didrikshate tvaam.*

*Mamottamashlokajaneshu sakhyam samsaarachakre
bhamatah svakarmabhih.
Tvanmaayayaa'tmaatmajadaarageheshvaasaktachittasya
na naatha bhooyaat.*

O Lord, I will not accept anything,
Be it Brahmaloaka, heaven or the empire of the world,
Or be it even the kingdom of the lower world.
I am not ready to accept even the siddhis of yoga,
Nor kaivalya, moksha or liberation itself.
As the wingless young fledglings still in the nest
Or hungry calves of cows eagerly await their mothers,
Or as a beloved, separated from his loved one,
In a far off place remains restless to meet him,
Similar is my condition, longing again and again
For the vision of your face, beautiful as a lotus.
I do not mind bondage to the wheel of birth and death,
Which is due to my karmas that I cannot avoid.
But I wish to live ever in the company of your devotees
And have friendship with those inspired souls alone.
I do not want to form any relation with others who,
By your maya, are attached to wife, son or house. (25-27)

“O Lord, You may send Your messenger and servant Hanuman to tell me what to do. I will do it. You need not tell me yourself. The spirit does not belong to me, it belongs to You. There is no question of my desiring a spiritual life; there is no question of my desiring *moksha* or freedom.”

This is absolute surrender. When one is helpless, when one has nowhere to go, when the body is completely tired and broken, when the mind does not function, then the soul becomes free to unite with Him. The bulb breaks and the energy returns to the powerhouse.

How can one understand the concept of sacrifice?

Swami Niranjanananda: The only concept of sacrifice that I understand is *asakti tyaga*, the renunciation of attachment. In relation to bhakti, renunciation of *ahamkara*, the ego identity, is the highest form of renunciation so that ultimately the force of divinity can be experienced in one's personality and life.

The basis of a good relationship between guru and disciple or between devotee and God is awareness, understanding and renunciation of the things that hold one's attention and creativity at the superficial, mundane level. Awareness must be there, for only through awareness can one recognize what one does and does not have. Understanding is necessary for developing a sense of discrimination, which leads to the third level of renunciation: shedding the things that are unnecessary.

India is a good place to learn how to shed things. As one sits in the sun, one has to remove layers piece by piece until one is practically sitting in one's birthday suit. Modern society teaches how to put things on, so that even in midsummer one wears sweaters in air-conditioned cars, offices and homes. If one leads a spontaneous life, many things tend to drop away naturally and spontaneously. Therefore, the basis of the guru-disciple relationship is awareness, understanding and renunciation, and if one follows this then the whole affair becomes a sequential process.

Sri Swami Satyananda simply moved on from one stage of life to the next without any crisis. People, on the other hand, have gone through a crisis for they have not been able to understand the progression. They have formulated their own ideas, beliefs and concepts about what they are doing. For Swami Satyananda, the progression from one level to the next was very smooth for he was always aware of the command, the mandate he received from his guru, Swami Sivananda. He was aware of the inspiration that he received from the forces above. He understood his role in relation to

what was happening in terms of yoga, working in India and abroad, and to his personal direction. He had awareness and understanding. Therefore, he was able to leave aside many unnecessary things. To people it looked like either a great renunciation or a great sacrifice, yet to him it was just natural.

The word ‘sacrifice’ has no meaning, yet if it must be used, it should mean shedding attachments, ego, ambitions and desires, and living a more natural, spontaneous life in tune with the divine will.

How does the act of giving affect the giver?

Swami Satyananda: The tendency to collect and amass property gives rise to wrong conduct. It leads to undesirable thought processes and unholy attitudes. However, the tendency to sacrifice brings about a complete change in a person’s behaviour, way of thinking and expression. This is the statement of the sages and seers. If a bottle filled with water is not used the water putrefies. If the water continues to flow it never putrefies. This should be the attitude of human behaviour.

God told me, “Swami Satyananda, as long as you are not amassing wealth for your own comfort and luxury you will get whatever you want.” Mother Lakshmi has issued a blank cheque, but it is not meant for my personal comfort. Be it the earthquake in Bhuj or the Orissa catastrophe, I can spend as much as I like on relief measures for disaster-affected people. That divine gift is always there. It is a service to the nation.

Why is renunciation a way to experience God?

Swami Satyananda: It is so easy to experience God. There is one path that is so easy that there is no other path. This is the path of yoga. Always crave, “Oh God, make me a dog, make me a goat, make me a cat, make me a mole, but not a man who goes on and on accumulating and accumulating only for himself.” Crave to become a human

being who keeps on renouncing, who even leaves behind his loincloth, his dhoti, her sari – go on renouncing! This is real renunciation. Everyone should have that feeling of renunciation within.

It is not difficult to renounce. It is really more difficult to accumulate. Adding penny by penny is a difficult task. Accumulation invites diseases such as heart attacks, high blood pressure and diabetes, but renunciation does not cause any of these problems.

What is the real point in depriving ourselves?

Swami Satyananda: God is the easiest thing in this world to attain. To renounce, to give up, to leave something is the easiest action. Many years are needed to gather and accumulate something, but it takes just one moment to leave it. The joy one gets from accumulating something is not a patch on the joy one gets from giving it up. Kabir says:

O friend, I am lured by poverty.

The bliss that I get from bhajans of Sri Rama

Is not found in affluence.

Being destitute is a blessing because one is close to God, but a rich person is not close to God. This is the teaching of Kabir, of the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Bible and all scriptures. Remember the line, 'Blessed are the poor'. However, it is only when one gets knocks and blows in the daily battle of life that the mind turns towards the spiritual path. Then viveka and vairagya arise. Without receiving knocks and blows no one would come out of their rut.

What is sacrifice in the guru-disciple relationship?

Swami Niranjanananda: The Sikh tradition of wearing a turban and having a beard started with Guru Gobind Singh, who was the last guru of the Sikhs. He had many followers, yet he wanted to define what real discipleship was. In his time nobody wore a turban, nobody had a beard, nobody had a moustache and nobody had the signs that

the Sikhs carry today. They were ordinary people. Once he called his followers and they came in thousands. The word is 'follower' not 'disciple'. He said, "I want people from among you whom I can sacrifice, to fulfil a purpose." Of course everybody said, "Forget it, I am not going to be sacrificed."

One person raised his hand up. The guru called him inside a tent, took out a sword, and outside people heard a big noise, whack! The guru came out with the blood-stained sword. He said, "One more." Everybody's heart was palpitating, wondering what was happening inside. One person was brave enough, he said, "I will sacrifice my life." "Come inside the tent," another, whack! Again the guru came out with the blood-stained sword. Only four followers were willing in that crowd of ten thousand. When the guru asked, "Next?" everybody ran away.

They did not know that nobody was killed. Inside the tent a goat was killed for dinner and the four followers were alive and well. Guru Gobind brought these four people out and said, "These are my four disciples in whom I am entrusting my work." He gave them five symbols, to have with them at all times: long hair, a comb, an iron bracelet, a dagger and the turban. From these people the Sikh tradition started. They are called Sikhs in Punjabi, but the same word 'Sikh' in Sanskrit is *shishya*, disciple, the one who is willing to give up the head. Willingness to give up the head means total surrender.

How does God test his devotees?

Swami Sivananda: God puts his devotees to severe tests and rigorous trials before He gives His darshan. Tulsidas, Ramdas and Surdas were all tested. If God tries His devotees, at the same time He bestows upon them immense inner strength, endurance and spiritual patience. Prince Surendranath told me, "Swamiji, I do not see any good in renunciation. All the sadhus, sannnyasins and mahatmas also suffer from diseases."

I replied, “Dear prince, you are young and cannot understand their internal state. Sadhus do not identify with their bodies. Even though they may cry out, the steady state of their wisdom, *jnana stithi*, is not broken. They are firm in their devotion to God. They have no sufferings at all. Bystanders may foolishly imagine that they are undergoing suffering, but their minds are fixed in God or Brahman. Their strong conviction is that there is no body in the past, present or future and that they are all-pervading atman or pure consciousness.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa had throat cancer, but he felt no pain as his mind was always fixed on Mother Kali. He had no time to even think of his body. A renunciate, sadhu or sannyasin has an inner peace, delight and divine bliss quite unknown to the worldly person. Even if you offer them kingdoms and riches they will shun them ruthlessly. Riches have no value in their eyes; they know their worthless nature. My dear prince, you have really no idea of the happy life of a sannyasin. You are still worldly-minded, though there is a slight trace of bhakti in your heart.”

Prince Surendranath said, “Swamiji, thank you very much. Now I understand your point well. The matter is quite clear now. I am really sorry. I had a wrong notion.” I continued, “Just hear, Prince Surendranath, this anecdote about two devotees, Rup and Sanatan, who, although enjoying regal powers, left their royal states at the bidding of Gouranga and passed the rest of their days under trees, relying on food that came to them unsought. They had sufferings which people would consider unbearable, yet they were, according to their own testimony, far happier when they were under trees than when they could sleep in palaces. The bhakta has his celestial joys unknown to people of the world.” Prince Surendranath said, “Swamiji, you have thrown a flood of light on the point. My doubts have vanished now. I am indeed grateful.”

What was your experience of surrendering to God and your relationship with Him?

Swami Satyananda: I came to realize that we are dependent on grace after practising spiritual life, sannyasa life, for many years. I tried everything possible. Then, on 19th January 1983, I resigned from the institution. I said, “God, I am tired. I can’t do anything more. I always wanted to go high in spiritual life. I wanted to attain this and that, but now I am tired.” In September 1988, I left everything – the work, responsibilities, friends, disciples, money and everything that I could consider to be my accomplishments. I couldn’t decide what to do. I went to Varanasi, then to Vindhyachal. I went to Maihar and then to Pashupatinath. I went to practically all the holy places in India. On 14th July 1989, I surrendered, laid down my arms as a defeated soldier, but I wanted amnesty from God.

I went to Tryambakeshwar, thirty kilometres from Nasik, from where the Godavari emerges and flows eastward. There I acquired a small room in a *goshala*, a cowshed, and decided to stay there for the whole of Chaturmas, that is, for two months. I went to the temple because Mrityunjaya, my ishta, is there. I have the ishta of Mrityunjaya Mahadev because it is to him I went in 1963, before coming to Munger. He gave me whatever I asked of him. I said, “I came to you in 1963 with a request. You fulfilled it. I gave you a promise and I am fulfilling it. Now tell me what to do and hereafter I promise I will do what you tell me. I will not do anything on my own.” I sat down and gradually lost consciousness. There was a huge storm with lightning and thunder. This storm happened internally, not externally. I heard a very clear, shrill voice say, “Twenty-one thousand six hundred times,” nothing else.

I made a decision: “Satyananda, you are not operating on your own just because you know so much about tantra, Vedanta, all the sadhanas and practices. Now only do what God says, and if he doesn’t say anything, don’t do anything! Eat, drink and be merry. I am the machine, you are the

machine operator. I am the car, you are the driver. Drive me, whichever way you like. O Lord, O Mother, if you cast me into hell or take me to heaven I will accept it as your blessing, but you are the operator of this machine, you drive this car.”



5

Faith – The Fruit of Positive Emotions

Love with faith is bhakti.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

BEYOND MIND AND EMOTION

What is faith?

Swami Satyananda: Faith is a quality that belongs to bhakti yoga, however in yoga and tantra, faith means awakening of kundalini. Faith belongs to man's higher evolution. It is the inherent reality of man's understanding of the deeper nature. Faith is not belief, it is the hidden knowledge in man. Faith is that dimension of knowledge which exists in a person, but has not actually become convincing to him.

What is the place of faith in our life?

Swami Satyananda: Faith is our greatest and most valuable equipment in life. Just as everyone has a spark of divinity, everyone has faith within. This faith needs to be exploded and developed. It is a gradual process, which begins with the guru and ends with the revelation that all is God. Faith cannot be seen, but everyone can feel it. It is a feeling, and it exists just as anger or hate exist and influence the physical functions of the body. The effect of *bhavana*, inner feeling, on the human body is tangible. Therefore, although faith

cannot be seen, the effects can be felt on the body. The cause can be known through the effect.

Faith is not merely a belief, it is confidence. Faith is a strong, resolute conviction in the existence of God, in the authority of the revealed scriptures and in the truth of the guru's teachings. It is much deeper than thought; it is an expression of the inner spirit. As one progresses along the path of evolution and leaves behind a trail of emotions, sentiments, memories, sense objects and so on, there is a peak of experience where things which come within a certain range of the mind appear to be a reality. That experience is the basis of faith.

Why must one develop faith?

Swami Sivananda: Faith is a rare flower of inestimable value. It must be cultivated in the garden of your heart. It must be nourished daily with the water of sincerity. The weeds of doubt and fears should be totally eradicated. Then it will strike deep root, blossom and bear the fruit of devotion quickly.

One cannot reach the goal of life with a faith that flickers at every step. One's faith must be as firm as the Himalayas. It must be as steady as a lamp that burns in a windless place. When one's faith is a living faith, it will develop into devotion to God.

Why is faith a jewel, a gem?

Swami Satyananda: Faith in God is a glorious, wish-fulfilling jewel. If the heart is full of the valuable jewel of faith, then the heart and mind will always be radiant. Throughout the day and night there will be no darkness. This illumination does not depend on any lamp or candle. Even if one is poor it doesn't matter. In fact, one who has faith is never poor. Poverty never approaches. Remember that poverty has nothing to do with money. There are people who are without money who are very rich. Poverty means ignorance, *avidya*. Faith dispels the overpowering gloom of ignorance like the sunlight dispels the clouds. Vanity and ignorance

automatically go away with the gem of faith. When faith and will develop, illumination arises from within just as the sun rises and illuminates the darkness.

What is faith and why is it essential?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Shraddha*, faith, does not need much elaboration. Belief is a quality of the mind and faith is a quality of the spirit. One can believe through the mind, one can disbelieve due to the mind, yet once faith arises, that fire, that force cannot be extinguished by the mind. Faith becomes the strength of human character.

Shraddha is associated with a positive feeling or emotion. When a feeling is established in positivity, jealousy, repulsion and revulsion are reduced and love and compassion are increased. This leads to the spontaneous expression of shraddha flourishing within. Faith is not associated with God or guru; they become the points of focus upon which shraddha rests. Faith is the connection between the individual and the transcendental Self. Without this feeling being established within, one cannot experience the divinity that resides in the heart. Tulsidas says that without faith even a *siddha*, an enlightened one, cannot see the divinity residing within his own heart. In this way, faith is the fruit or attainment of positive feelings and emotions, which not only join one with the divinity of the inner self, but also ensure that one is never separated from this divinity residing within. Faith is a mobile phone. It always keeps one in touch with the person one loves.

What will the devotee discover as his faith grows?

Swami Satyananda: The main purpose of faith and trust is to develop love for God, bhakti, even while living in the external, transient world. One does not develop these spiritual attributes merely to solve one's problems, but to develop an experience of God, to have darshan and merge in Him. This should be the aim: if not today, then tomorrow, if not tomorrow, then in the next life.

The devotee will discover that faith brings spontaneity into his life. Even if one does not want to love God, one will love Him. Even if one does not want to surrender, one will have to. Even if one does not want anything from Him, He will give everything. Faith in God brings spontaneous blessings. God also wants spontaneity in His relationship with the devotee. When He gives pain, one must accept it, and not say it is due to a curse or bad karma. People usually think that only good things are God's blessings, but faith turns suffering into a blessing.

What is the importance of faith in spiritual life?

Swami Satyananda: Faith in God is the first rung in the ladder of spirituality. It inspires hope in the seeker of truth to attain divine grace. Have perfect trust in God, abandon all fears, cares, worries and be at perfect ease. Faith transcends reason. Faith alone opens the door of eternal bliss and immortal abode. Have unswerving, unshakeable faith and enter the illimitable domain of everlasting peace.

Which obstacles can be overcome with faith?

Swami Satyananda: Overcome obstacles with faith. Intellect (not intelligence) is a great obstacle. Transcend intellect. Intellect creates dissipation, initiates doubts and discouragement, while faith heals, soothes, strengthens and illuminates. It materializes divine experience during meditation. Whatever might be the intellectual futility of faith, believe me, it is faith alone which is capable of emptying the mind of all inherited and cultivated thoughts and its modifications.

Laziness is the greatest of all enemies. Faith in God can overcome any amount of laziness. Laziness is a clear indication that the sadhaka lacks in faith.

What is the greatest achievement of human life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Some scriptures say it is the attainment of a body; others, that intelligence makes us unique from other life forms. There are diverse opinions as to what

the greatest attainment of human life is, and maybe from their particular perspective all are correct. However, from another perspective the greatest attainment one can have in life is faith, because faith keeps the mind and emotions balanced. Faith does not allow one to undergo either emotional or intellectual infidelity. This is one of the most important points about faith.

Faith is the original expression of the human heart. When a person is born, he functions through the heart, not the mind. When he starts formal education, the mind takes over and the heart component is relegated to the background, so that in the course of his life he functions through the intellect, through logic. The questions, “Why?”, “How?” relate to intellectual expressions and understanding. Certain things, however, cannot be understood or even analyzed by the faculty of intelligence, and that is the strength of the heart. The heart is always looking for support, security, compassion, love and affection – all the goodness and beauty in life. The mind can think about and aspire for good things, yet it is always diverted from them. The desire remains a desire, the thought remains a thought and the aspirations can never be implemented.

How is faith related to one’s sadhana?

Swami Sivananda: Spiritual progress depends on faith in God, the scriptures and guru. Faith is the basis of all progress. Even material progress and discoveries depend upon faith – faith in oneself. It may be easy to place faith in mathematics, in known scientific laws, and work towards the achievement of your object. In the spiritual realm, with its unseen laws and unseen effects, it is more difficult to place faith. Initial faith is necessary.

Even if one does sincere sadhana for one full year, one will have some little experience, some concrete evidence to convince one of the existence of an unseen power, of laws which science cannot explain, which reason is powerless to analyze. With every fresh experience, one’s faith in guru,

God, the scriptures and spiritual laws grows; and with every increase of faith, one does more sadhana. The chain goes on, and provided one is vigilant and does not fall prey to the temptations which are placed before all aspirants, one day one will certainly attain that final experience – the proof positive.

What is the importance of faith in one's life?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are different mentalities, different *samskaras*, impressions belonging to each civilization, each group in society. The mentality of each society depends on the social environment. If the social environment has no balance between the material drive and the spiritual aspirations, then one disconnects from the heart forces and energies. When there is disconnection from the heart forces, the mind transforms itself, becoming more gross, materialistic and sensual, more full of cravings and desires. These cravings, desires and ambitions lead one to seek fulfilment outside. When one is unable to find pleasure, happiness and fulfilment in the world, one goes into a depressive cycle or an insecure cycle, an aggressive cycle or a fearful cycle, which then controls one's behaviour. Psychological and emotional imbalances disturb the family and then society becomes disturbed. To avoid that frustration, one becomes addicted to something, which takes the mind away from that depression.

This is where faith comes in. Faith is the quality that balances the psychological and emotional disturbances. For example, there is a big psychological difference between a beggar and a thief who has a knife or a gun to rob people of their valuables, and, if they resist, will possibly harm them. If a beggar in India does not receive five rupees and goes hungry, at night before going to sleep he will say, "God didn't want me to eat today. I accept God's will. Maybe tomorrow will be a better day." He will remain content with that feeling. Faith will give some peace, solace, comfort and security, an awareness that he is being guided by his creator.

For a thief, however, personal fulfilment is more important than another's life.

What are the various aspects of faith?

Swami Satyananda: Faith is the greatest property and special wealth. Faith is a spiritual substance and the main factor behind existence. If one could maintain innocent faith without any intellectual pollution, there would be nothing in life that one could not do. If I have faith I can move a mountain. I can part the ocean or make the sea dry. This faith is a spark of divinity which can be found in everybody.

God and faith are two sides of the same coin. The moment one has realization of faith, one has realization of God; the moment one has realization of God, one has realization of faith. Faith is not merely a belief in something. Faith is confidence. Faith is a strong, unshakeable conviction in the existence of God, in the authority of the revealed scriptures and in the truth of what the guru says.

What is the difference between faith and belief?

Swami Niranjanananda: Belief is mind speech. Faith is heart speech. If one can lose faith easily due to disillusionment, it means that one never had it. Belief can often be construed as faith due to the understanding that belief means acceptance with adherence, placing one's trust in what one has accepted. However, in faith there is trust, surrender and acceptance, not adherence. In belief it is not necessary to have the feeling of surrender. Adherence can often become a way of surrender, when one feels, 'I have been following this for so many years in my own life that I feel I have surrendered myself'.

Belief can be broken; faith cannot be broken. If faith is broken, it means it was only a head-trip without any real inner surrender. One has to surrender to oneself to one's feelings and convictions. One never surrenders to another person. One might say that one has surrendered to the guru and accepted him as one's guru. Surrender happens when there is trust and belief in oneself. Even if the guru is miles

away, yet one identifies with him in spirit, mind, behaviour, action and wisdom, then one can say, “Yes, I have been able to surrender.”

Belief and surrender are interesting concepts. I can believe that Swami ‘X’ is a nice person, containing the wisdom of the ages. I may feel that this person can guide me, be my refuge. I feel a great energy field around that person in the form of love, compassion and knowledge. That is my link with this swami whom I have accepted as my guru; however, it is only a belief, it is not faith. It is a belief that I have created in order to give myself a direction in which to move.

It may happen that somebody comes and says, “Swami ‘X’ is a bad person, look what has happened because of him” and suddenly one thinks, “Right, that Swami ‘X’ must be a bad person” and one’s belief is gone! Faith cannot be shattered; it was only a belief which shattered, and it did not shatter due to a personal experience, but because one is susceptible to the influence of other people. If one has accepted somebody, something or some idea as the focal point, there has to be a feeling of unity with which a third person cannot interfere. If unity exists, faith manifests. If unity does not exist, it is only a heady concept, a belief, a thought, that can be shattered at any time.

Belief can change; faith can never change. Faith is awareness of the quality which is good within oneself, the other person and everyone. It is communicating at that level where one is able to experience equality. Belief and faith are matters of individual discovery. This discovery can only happen if one is sincere with oneself.

How can one distinguish between faith and belief?

Swami Niranjanananda: Faith and belief represent some basic realizations that one may have had about oneself and God. One can say belief is personal reflection and faith is universal reflection. One has faith in God, something and somebody whom one has never seen and may not see in this lifetime,

yet faith continues. There is faith in some transcendental form of existence, and there is belief in oneself.

Every aspect of creation is guided by its inherent nature. The nature of a fruit tree is to eventually bear fruit. The nature of a human being is to experience peace, truth and bliss. If the seed of a fruit tree is left above ground in the middle of a desert, it will not germinate, much less become a tree and fulfil its nature by bringing forth fruit. One has to plant the seed, care for it and create the right environment for it to fulfil its destiny. It is the same with human beings. The nature of a human being is to experience *satyam*, truth; *shivam*, positivity, auspiciousness; and *sundaram*, beauty. However, to have this experience one has to create the right environment. One cannot just say, "I am going to fulfil my destiny."

The right environment begins with belief in one's own potential and ability and faith in God, *Ishwara pranidhana*, knowing one is being guided and directed, and that the essence in oneself is the same as the essence of God. This is the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. Whether water is contained in an ocean, a river, a lake or a cloud, the essence is the same: H₂O. Similarly, the essence of God and the reflection of that essence in everyone is the same. The essence of water is called H₂O and the essence of divinity, God. Recognizing and realizing that essence is the development of faith and belief. Therefore, one component of bhakti is dropping the masks and experiencing the reality at a personal level, a social level and a global level. If the aim of bhakti is to experience truth, the first sadhana of bhakti is to realize the truth of who and what one really is.

Once faith and belief are alive and active, the emotions are channelled and this is bhakti. Emotion is e-motion: energy in motion. When it is directed outwards into the world, one experiences pleasure, pain, change, likes, dislikes, fulfilment, satisfaction, as well as a vacuum and emptiness. However, when the same energies are directed inwards with the help of faith and belief, it becomes bhakti. Bhakti is channelling the emotions towards transcendental realization.

What is the place of faith, belief and intellect in one's life?

Swami Satyananda: Faith is a spiritual substance and the main factor behind human existence. If innocent faith could be maintained without any intellectual pollution, one could do anything in life. Knowledge of God is one aspect and faith in God is another. Through knowledge alone one may or may not develop communion; it is never a certainty. Knowledge of God does not necessarily bring one closer or guarantee communion with Him, but faith does. Faith has to be experienced. A child has faith, a disciple has faith, and that faith is realization.

Faith does not demand any proof or epistemological conclusions. One cannot say that one will have faith in God only when one has seen Him. He cannot be seen until one's faith is complete. Faith is an intuitive attitude which one cultivates inwardly even before coming across an object or a person. It is the first and foremost condition. Of course, faith presupposes love. Thus one loves the object of one's faith. Awareness follows, then surrender, then merging and finally realization. This is how the aspirant progresses.

There are many stories about saints, miracle workers and great devotees. Things have happened to them and around them which cannot be explained in terms of human knowledge. This is due to faith. One has to guard and protect one's faith because intellect and logic kill faith. However, if the difference between faith and intellect is understood properly, both can develop simultaneously in their respective directions.

Usually one's faith in God is intellectual. It is therefore not faith at all, but an idea. Most people believe in God; they love, respect and worship Him. That is belief. Generally, when people refer to faith in guru or God, they mean that they are intellectually convinced of the guru's or God's superiority, a notion acquired from their parents or society. What most people have is belief, and it is mistaken for faith. Many also kill the little belief with which they could have survived on the psycho-emotional level. They say there is no God and conduct arguments on the subject, damaging their

only link with the divine forces. Therefore, it is necessary to protect one's faith as well as one's belief.

Faith, however, is more than belief. It is a higher energy in a concentrated form. Belief can fail, and sometimes does. Intellect fails, but faith is infallible. It will never fail because faith is not an expression of the mind. It is understood through the mind, but not expressed through the mind. It has a different source and a different channel.

A human being has intelligence and faith. It is through intelligence that he learns about God, but it is through faith that he experiences God. Not knowledge but experience comes about through faith. Just as love, enmity, jealousy, joy and sorrow are not the stuff of the intellect but of experience, faith is also a matter of experience. The basis of the intellect is analysis. The Upanishads may have been written with the help of intelligence, but faith is such a substance that it accepts even the invisible. After all, no one has seen anger, but anger exists. This is a matter of faith. Faith needs to be experienced, not seen.

Faith and belief are essential, though intellect has its own place. Intellectuals ask why idols of gods and goddesses are worshipped. At the level of intellect, this may seem strange. After all, how can a piece of stone be God? How can a piece of paper be God? How can a person who eats and sleeps be guru and God? The intellect may question this, but when it comes to faith, then a stone is indeed God, a leaf is God and a tree is God.

What is the importance of faith and trust?

Swami Niranjanananda: On the path of bhakti, two pillars or supports are essential for the mind: faith and trust. In the *Ramacharitamanas* faith and trust have been acknowledged as the foundation of bhakti (Balakanda, sloka 2):

*Bhavaaneeshankarau vande shraddhaavishwaasroopinau;
Yaabhyaam vinaa na pashyanti siddhaah
svaantasthameeshvaram.*

I bow down to Parvati and Shiva,
Who are embodiments of faith and trust.
Without them, even the adept cannot perceive God,
Although He dwells within all alike.

Without faith and trust, even an adept cannot see the Spirit within, cannot understand, know or recognize that. Therefore, faith and trust are considered to be the foundation of bhakti – faith in the higher power and trust in oneself. Have faith in God and trust in yourself.

Usually people do not believe in themselves, they think they are weak and powerless, and they question their ability and capacity to do something in life. Even before beginning a task they feel defeated by it. There is a lack of *sankalpa shakti*, power of resolve; *iccha shakti*, power of will; and *kriya shakti*, power of action in life. If one is determined, one can accomplish anything in life. Resolve comes with trust – trust in one's own capacity and capability. God has not sent anyone into this world with anything less than the next person. The same power and energy in Rama or Buddha, Mahavira, Krishna, Jesus Christ or Prophet Mohammed are also within everyone. The difference is that they have realized it and people have not been able to realize it.

From a psychological point of view, God is an expression and experience of the evolution of consciousness; that is all. When a child goes to school he learns and acquires knowledge of the alphabet. In the process of intellectual development, gradually many things are learnt, the understanding grows, the consciousness grows. The child who could not even write 'ABC' can grow up to become the head of a country, a great scientist or even a great saint. For that, the consciousness needs to undergo the process of development whereby the child expands his consciousness, mind, intellect and emotions. From this viewpoint, God is an experience of the maturity of the mind. Maturity of the mind results in attraction to God, knowledge of God, belief in God and attaining a vision of God.

Trust and faith are the foundation of bhakti. Trust that one is capable of acquiring joy, comfort and competence in life. Faith that one is not alone in the world, that there is someone who is one's intimate friend, closer than the husband or wife, closer even than the children – someone who is truly inherent.

In ancient Sparta newborn babies were left outside the house all night, regardless of snow, rain or heat. The baby faced the natural conditions outside all night long. If it lived until the morning, it was brought back inside the house. There was another custom followed there. When a boy reached the age of sixteen, he was blindfolded and left in the dense forest. There would be wild, ferocious animals all around. The blindfolded boy would be petrified. In the morning he was brought home and said to have become a man.

Once, after having gone through this process, a boy asked his father, "Tell me, when a child is left in the forest to become a man, don't the parents worry that some ferocious animal will kill the child and eat him?" The father said, "Son, since you have passed the test I will tell you the secret. When you were blindfolded and left in the jungle, you were never alone. You thought that you were alone, but ten steps away from you I stood well-armed to protect you from dangerous animals."

It is the same in life. People think they are alone; however, they are never alone. Once, a devotee who was a dear friend of God said to Him, "Let us go for a walk." God said, "Fine. You walk in front, I will walk behind you." The devotee asked, "How will I know that you are walking behind me?" God replied, "Whenever you turn around you will find two sets of footprints: one set will be mine, the other set yours. By that you will know that I have been walking with you."

Happily, the devotee started to walk. He crossed a river, a jungle, a mountain. Many times he felt that God was walking behind him; he could hear the sound of footsteps. Many times he felt he was alone and upon turning around

he would see only a single set of footprints. Finally, he felt dejected and said, “God, you are not keeping your word. You said that you would always be with me, yet many times when I turn around to look, you are not with me and I see only a single set of footprints on the ground. Why do you disappear?”

God said, “I do not disappear. When the path is difficult, I carry you in my arms. That is why you see only one set of footprints. When the path is easy, I put you down, we walk together again and you see two sets of footprints.” When the path is easy God leaves one to stand on one’s own feet, and says, “Child, walk. There is no problem here, keep walking.” The moment the going gets tough, God picks up His devotee in His arms and carries him.

The great saints in history, no matter which culture or religion they belonged to, experienced God constantly in their lives, and the basis of that realization was faith and trust.

How can one strengthen one’s faith?

Swami Sivananda: Faith can be strengthened through satsang, prayer, self-purification, meditation and study of scriptures. You can ascend the rungs of the spiritual ladder with the help of intense, unflinching faith alone. When a doubt arises, dispel it by means of well-directed, strong suggestions and affirmations such as: “I will succeed. There is no doubt of this. In my dictionary there are no such words as can’t, impossible and difficult.”

Whenever doubts assail you, reject them ruthlessly. Open your heart to the divine light, the source of all knowledge, all light. Become as simple as a child. Pray from the bottom of your heart. The flame will again become brighter and brighter.

Do not argue. You will not gain anything. Sit before your spiritual preceptor or a saint quietly and meditate for an hour. Let the soul speak to the Soul. All your doubts will be cleared by themselves. You will have good experiences. You

will enjoy a peculiar peace. There will be a holy thrill of joy in your heart. This is the way for your spiritual growth.

Abandon all sorts of unproductive beliefs, superstitions, weaknesses, wrong notions and ideas of impossibilities. Cling fast to faith in divine possibilities. Have faith in divine life. Aspire fervently and constantly to live in the divine. When you hear discourses that disturb your faith, leave the place at once. Do not keep company with such people until you have grown, until you are established on the rock of divine love. Never budge an inch from your present position. Stand adamant on the bedrock of faith. May you have the intense, living faith of Prahlada!

Why is everything possible?

Swami Satyananda: This word 'impossible' is not the word of an arrogant person. With faith one can eliminate disease, no matter what it is; one can change one's nature overnight, no matter how bad it is; and what's more, one can be anything in life regardless of what one is today. A humble person with limited resources in life, once he realizes faith, realizes God. So tell me, what is impossible?

God is formless; God is an experience. God is transcendental existence. One cannot see him with the naked eye or by means of this mind. One cannot realize him by any mundane sensual tools but when faith becomes effulgent, God is there.

How does upasana or inner worship open up the paths of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: From the yogic perspective, *upasana* or worship is considered the highest sadhana because it does not involve identifying with a pre-set idea. Rather one is allowed to discover one's own expressions and experiences which develop faith and belief. Without faith and belief, which is one's own inner experience based on one's own inner understanding, it becomes impossible to discover the divinity inside. No matter how high one goes on the spiritual

ladder, if one is not connected with the transcendental energy, the spirit of yoga, the spirit of bhakti, yoga only remains half a process.

Yoga says that bhakti is an inner process of purification, transformation and connection with the inner self. It is not about devotion. The concept of devotion came when structured belief systems or religions developed after the spiritual discoveries were made by the ancient seers. The ancient spiritual texts that give the spirit and methods of bhakti yoga predate the introduction of organized religion.

How are bhakti yoga and faith interrelated?

Swami Satyananda: To practise bhakti yoga is not difficult – only faith is required. Without it there is no bhakti, no devotion, but this faith is not in the form of belief. It is a firm conviction which the intellect can never pierce. No logic, argument nor rationalizing can put down this faith which is the deepest personality of everyone. It is not intellectual in nature. It is an innocent conviction, perhaps like that of a child who naturally accepts his mother as such without even questioning its reality even for a moment. When a person has faith it is not necessary to analyze, define or put it under the X-ray of the intellect.

At the beginning of the great Indian epic, *Ramayana*, the story of the life of Sri Rama whom Hindus respect as the incarnation of the supreme God, the author, a humble man, writes that faith is the ultimate source of power and realization. A man without faith is a man without devotion. Once one has discovered this faith within one can immediately start practising bhakti yoga. Faith cannot be imported from outside through books or holy associations. It is dormant potential lying within. Books written by saints, satsang and the practices of bhakti yoga all aim to awaken faith through which one will have a definite glimpse of God.

THE POWER OF FAITH

How does God test the faith of a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: Your faith will be tested in various ways. However, even under extreme trials and difficulties you should not lose your faith, your sole anchor.

Kannappa, the hunter of Kalahasti, had true, living faith in Shiva. His daily offering to God was the flesh of wild beasts. One day Shiva tested the sincerity of Kannappa. Tears fell from the right eye of the Shivalingam. Kannappa was sorely moved. He plucked out his right eye and fixed it in the right eye of the lingam. The next day there were tears in the lingam's left eye. Kannappa plucked out his left eye and fixed it in the lingam. At once Shiva appeared before him and blessed him. Kannappa immediately had new eyes and attained the kingdom of Kailash, Shiva's abode of immortality and eternal bliss. You should possess the same unshakeable living faith which Kannappa had. Then only can you enjoy the everlasting peace of the Eternal.

How does Sri Krishna describe the three kinds of faith?

Swami Niranjanananda: The statements of realized beings are the guidelines which can lead one from ignorance to wisdom, from a restrictive nature to liberation, yet one needs to follow these guidelines and disciplines faithfully as they are set forth. In Chapter 17 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna delves into the question of faith and discipline. Arjuna asks, "Can one walk the path just by faith, without following any discipline or guidelines?" (17:1)

*Ye shaastravidhimutsrija yajante shraddhayaanvitaah;
Teeshaam nishthaa tu kaa krishna sattvamaaho rajastamah.*

Those who set aside scriptural injunctions and sacrifice with faith, where do they stand, Krishna, in sattwa, rajas or tamas?

The question is: Are those people who attempt to walk the spiritual path by faith alone, without adhering to any form of discipline, doing the right thing? Is that kind of nature, in which faith is predominant and effort non-existent, sattwic, rajasic or tamasic?

Not surprisingly, Sri Krishna anticipated other questions and so he said, “Look, you are asking me about faith only, nevertheless, I will tell you everything in relation to the individual. There is no doubt that everything falls into the category of sattwa, rajas and tamas, so faith is also sattwic, rajasic and tamasic. Even effort, purushartha, is of these three kinds. Not only that, even the means and lifestyle which you adopt as a sadhaka falls into the three categories.”

The faith that exists in embodied beings is born of their nature, *swabhava*. Faith is not something which one receives from outside or which one can cultivate; it is inherent in everyone. Sri Krishna says (17:2):

*Trividhaa bhavati shraddhaa dehinaam saa svabhaavajaa;
Saattvikee raajasee chaiva taamasee cheti taam shrinu.*

The inherent faith of embodied beings is threefold: sattwic, rajasic and tamasic. Hear about it from Me.

Love is also inherent in everyone. Only due to one’s association with the senses and the objects of pleasure which colour one’s mentality, one is not able to discover one’s faith and bhakti.

When people ask how they can learn bhakti, Sri Swami Satyananda said clearly that bhakti is not like hatha yoga or raja yoga, something that one can learn in an ashram. Bhakti is a natural, spontaneous expression of one’s life and it already exists within everyone; one does not have to develop it. Sri Krishna is telling Arjuna the same. Faith is born out of one’s nature as the result of accumulated experiences, samskaras and karmas. In each lifetime one has another nature, *swabhava*. In each lifetime, as one gathers more impressions and experiences, the new collection is creating

a different nature for the next life. Faith is the result of one's accumulated personality blooming in this life.

If one is sattwic, one's faith will be sattwic. If one is tamasic, one's faith will be tamasic. If one's nature, personality, attitudes, thoughts and behaviour are rajasic, one's faith will be rajasic. This sloka explains everything (17:3):

*Sattvaanuroopaa sarvasya shraddhaa bhavati bhaarata;
Shraddhaamayam purusho yo yachchhraddhah sa eva sah.*

The faith of each accords with his nature. Faith constitutes the very being of man. As a man's faith is, so is he.

Faith is what one feels inside, and the entire being survives on faith. Faith is not linked to a religious concept, belief or dogma. Faith is what nurtures the personality. Faith is what connects the individual being with the higher being. It is the link, the connection, and each person expresses that faith and is that faith in their life. Sri Krishna continues to explain the three kinds of faith (17:4):

*Yajante saattvikaa devaanyaksharakshaamsi raajasaah;
Pretaanbhootaganaamshchaanye yajante taamasaa janaah.*

Sattwic people worship the gods, the rajasic worship the spirits guarding wealth and power, and the tamasic worship ghosts.

People who are endowed with sattwic faith don't identify with the lower levels of existence or life, or with nature spirits. In their mind they only have one idea, "How can I attain the highest?" Therefore, Sri Krishna says that worship of the gods is performed by the sattwic person. Their inherent faith, due to the accumulation of positive karmas and samskaras, makes them seek union with the highest nature.

People who are rajasic seek dominance, power, position and control. They are manipulative. Such people are endowed with faith, which is rajasic in nature and therefore

they take refuge in rajasic spirits to assist them in attaining their desires. Similarly, people endowed with tamasic faith are going to take recourse to the lower forms of nature spirits to help them attain their goal.

In people's lives, when one guna is predominant, thoughts often come such as, "Oh, I wish I had that power." To attain that siddhi, people perform sadhanas that invoke the lower category of forces or link them with the intermediate category of forces. Some people also perform sadhana for siddhis that involve connecting with the higher forces; however, those who connect with the higher forces eventually lose the desire to attain siddhis and become self-disciplined.

Sri Swamiji, can you give some examples of faith?

Swami Satyananda: At the Kumbha Mela, when the Naga sadhus urinate here and there, everyone runs to pick up some of that sand and rub it all over the body like bhasma. Who will stop this? Is this written in some Veda or shastra? Has some guru preached this? No, this is one's own faith. That which is inborn is called faith and that which is given by another is called knowledge. This faith has been born within oneself. People go and smear themselves with urine-soaked sand. Why they do it is something only they know. Such things do not happen only in India, it happens in all religions.

The main support of human life is faith, not the intellect. One never thinks about that which is clear. This is faith. Faith and trust are deep and mysterious. A child believes in God naturally, as Mirabai did. Some saint gave her a wooden statue of Krishna and Mirabai fell in love with it. She must have been a small girl at the time. To the little girl, that small statue of Gopal became her husband. When she grew up she saw Gopal as an adult, like herself.

Mirabai was either insane or she was completely natural. The thought just did not occur to her as to how a wooden statue could be a man or her husband. This thought just

never entered her mind. So many people tried to reason with her, but she had just the one thing on her mind:

*Mere to Giradhara Gopaala doosaro na koyee
Jaake sira mora mukuta mero pati soyee.*

Only Krishna is mine, nobody else; the one who wears a peacock feather on his head is my husband.

Faith needs no explanation. One may feel devotion or respect towards someone after seeing them; one might feel that they are wise or beautiful. However, faith is experienced without ever seeing the object of the faith. There is not a thought about it; it is spontaneous and simple. One believed that one's father was one's father. This is trust. It is the same with God. Those who have this kind of faith, they attain. Such trusting people are straightforward and simple.

When I reached Munger, Nandkishore Goenka was twelve or thirteen years of age. He had the white patches of leucoderma on his lips. One day he asked me for a cure and I said to him, "Practise Chhat pooja." He performed Chhat pooja during the festival that celebrates and worships the sun, and the patches disappeared. Why did they go? They disappeared because of trust.

Children are spontaneously and naturally trusting. They believe whatever people tell them. Whenever one accepts something without contesting it, that is *vishwasa*, trust. *Vishwasah siddhidayakah vishvassah phaldayakah* – "The fruit is attained only by trust." In this world, at least ninety percent of the population lives on trust. Such people can be found everywhere, not only at the Kumbha Mela.

How did Shiva save his devotee, Markandeya?

Swami Sivananda: The story of Markandeya illustrates the power of faith. Markandeya was a great devotee of Shiva. His father Mrikandu performed rigorous austerities to get a son. Shiva appeared before him and said, "O Rishi, do you want a good son who will die in his sixteenth year or a bad and

foolish son who will live for a long time?” Mrikandu replied, “O my venerable Lord, let me have a good son.”

The boy came to know about his fate and began to worship Shiva wholeheartedly with intense faith and devotion. The boy entered into deep meditation and samadhi on the day decreed as the day of his death. The messengers of Yama were not able to approach him. Hence, Yama himself went to take away his life. The boy prayed to Shiva for protection and embraced the Lingam. Then Yama threw his noose round the Lingam and the boy. Shiva came out of the Lingam immediately and killed Yama to protect the boy. Shiva was called Mrityunjaya and Kala-kala from that day.

Then the devas approached Shiva and said, “O adorable Lord, salutations unto Thee. Pardon Yama for his mistake. O ocean of mercy, bring him back to life”. Then Shiva brought Yama back to life at the request of the gods. He also conferred a boon to the boy Markandeya that he should live forever as a boy of sixteen years of age.

Why is faith important on the spiritual path?

Swami Sivananda: Bhakti is the development of faith, and jnana is the development of bhakti. Faith leads to the final experience. Whatever a person strongly believes in, that he experiences and that he becomes. Faith is the fundamental necessity for spiritual sadhana. Not an iota of progress is ever possible on the path of spirituality without faith. No faith, no devotion. No faith, no jnana.

Faith is one of the important items in the *shadsampat* or six-fold virtues of the four means of salvation or *sadhana chatusthaya* on the path of realization. Sage Patanjali, the exponent of raja yoga, lays much stress on faith. He says in the *Yoga Sutras* (1:20):

*Shraddhaaveeryasmritisamaadhiprajnaapoorvaka
itareshaam.*

To others this samadhi comes through faith, energy, memory, concentration and discrimination of the real.

He has placed faith at the very beginning of this verse. If a person has faith, then energy and memory come by themselves. He will collect all his energies and remember the ultimate essence and exert to realize the basic reality. The shrutis emphatically declare: *Shraddha bhakti dhyana yogadvai hi* – “Know Him by faith, devotion and meditation.” Faith comes first. Without faith you cannot practise either concentration or meditation.

Faith must be living and unwavering. One cannot achieve anything sublime with a weak faith. One cannot reach the goal with a faith that flickers at every step.

What are the steps helpful and necessary to develop faith?

Swami Satyananda: People suffer because of their desires, for there is no end to desires and they will never be fulfilled. Desires are like the waves of the ocean which arise incessantly, one after another. When suffering becomes unbearable and there is no way out, people turn to God. Intense faith develops and then the crisis slowly goes away. But it is when one is in the middle of the crisis that one should transform one's entire life totally. When a situation occurs in which God is experienced as the helper, then and there the aspirant should transform his life and give it a totally new direction. He should leave everything, surrender everything to God, and tread the path to God. Many people experience their prayers being answered, but still they do not see the depth of their own faith.

To develop faith, in the beginning effort is necessary. One has to keep one's inner awareness of faith awake continuously, whether talking, meeting, arguing or explaining something to someone. If this objective is forgotten a few times in the beginning, there should be no frustration. The effort must be persistent. One must try to understand what one is doing. In order to keep the spiritual awareness awake one must be forever alert, optimistic and self-assured. One should have faith in the name and power of one's *ishta*, chosen deity. One must have confidence and conviction in the reality of

one's inner essence; only then will this spiritual power work. However, it is quite certain that in the beginning a determined effort must be made. One must be full of determination. "It must and it shall happen!" should be the mantra.

When one takes the path of the spirit, that other element begins to rouse. One should now refer to that other element and not look upon oneself as a physical body. What is there in the world that one cannot accomplish? One should let go of doubts, let go of the intellectual question, "What if it does not happen?" Instead revel in the greatness that exists within. Each form of behaviour, each principle, each habit that undermines one's faith should be carefully extracted and removed. One should change one's manner of speaking, ambitions, language and viewpoint. One should change one's self-created convictions and thoughts. Only then will the power of faith be seen manifesting in the depths of one's life.

Any individual who searches for Him with love finds the jewel. Firm faith in God is the reward of all spiritual effort. Whether one practises asana, pranayama, kundalini yoga, raja yoga or rebirthing, the reward has to be faith. However, nobody has ever acquired the jewel of faith without the help of saints. No matter what sadhana one does, ultimately one has to come to a saint. Whosoever bears this in mind and communes with the good, finds devotion to God an easy attainment. It is the saints who bring this wisdom to the world.

In order to protect faith, to increase and experience it more fully and intimately, the relationship between God and devotee, or guru and disciple, comes first. This relationship is a matter of total faith, living faith. One has to believe in the same way one believes in one's mother. How does one know that one's mother is really one's mother? Through faith. There has to be the same faith in God and guru.

How does God respond to pure faith?

Swami Sivananda: When Namdev was a child, his father would visit the temple of Vittoba or Sri Krishna at Pandarpur and offer worship with fruits, rice and other items. One

day, he had to visit a neighbouring village on some urgent business and could not attend to the worship. Namdev's mother gave the offerings to Namdev and asked him to go and offer them to Vittoba. The boy took the articles of worship and placed them before the image and requested Him to eat the same. When he found that the image was silent, he started weeping bitterly in acute agony. Then Vittal appeared before him in human form and actually ate the offering in order to please his child-devotee. Faith and devotion can work wonders, and God becomes a slave of the devotee.

True devotion will bring God to you. Shabari was a woman of the forest tribe of Bhils. She presented Sri Rama with some fruits which she had bitten to know if they were sweet. Rama accepted the offering with intense delight on account of the true spirit of devotion in which it was made. What is wanted is a loving heart. God does not want precious gifts. The prayer must be from the bottom of the heart. Love without attachment is needed. The self-surrender must be sincere, perfect, ungrudging and unreserved. When this is effected, one need not do any sadhana at all. Divine power will do everything.

How does faith relate to the world?

Swami Sivananda: Even the greatest philosopher has faith as his stronghold. No intellectual theory can be proved if it is not supported by faith. The whole world stands on faith and is guided by faith. All religions are rooted in faith. One cannot prove the existence of God if he has no faith in God. Faith is not the voice of the mind which deludes, but the voice of the soul that uplifts and takes one to the goal. The aspirant should cling fast to faith in divine possibilities and constantly aspire to live in the Divine.

The whole world is a product of faith and imagination. Without faith in the world, the world does not exist. Without faith in sensual objects, they will not give pleasure. Without faith in God, one can never reach surrender and perfection.

Faith is the fundamental necessity for all spiritual practice. Aspiration is the development of faith; it is one step ahead of faith. The flame of faith becomes the conflagration of spiritual aspiration. The devotee longs to have union with the Beloved. He has no sleep, no rest. He always contemplates how to attain the object of his love. He prays and sings to his God, and a type of divine madness overtakes him. He completely loses his personality in the aspiration for attaining God. This is the kind of faith required for samarpan.

An aspirant perceives distance, distinction and separation from God inasmuch as he depends on the external world and believes and experiences its necessity. However, with faith in God as his own inner essence, the world will eventually fall away and the devotee will experience nearness, identification and the feeling of non-separation from God. This experience is possible only through faith and the feeling that all beings are His manifestation.

Is it true that faith works miracles?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a story of a priest who was travelling through certain remote islands on a ship. As they disembarked to explore the islands they found savages dwelling there. But surprisingly, they were saying the prayers of the Lord, "Our Father who art in heaven, Thy kingdom come . . ." However, they were saying it wrong, the sentences were all topsy-turvy.

The priest asked the savages, "Who has taught you these prayers? They are all wrong." The savages replied, "About ten years ago, another priest like you had come to our island and taught us this prayer. Then he left. Of course we are illiterate people, we may have forgotten the right words and sentences, but we pray whatever we remember." This priest told them, "Don't worry, I will teach you the correct method." Painstakingly, word by word, he taught them the prayer of the Lord. When the savages had learned it and were able to repeat the whole prayer correctly, the priest thought his work was done, so he got on his ship and left.

When the ship was out on the ocean, about four to five hours away from the island, somebody called out from the crow's-nest, "Unknown objects approaching the ship." Everybody came out to the decks to look at the objects. When they came nearer the ship, they were recognized as the savages from the island. They were running on water. Everybody was utterly surprised. How could the savages have the power which only Jesus had – to walk on water?

When the savages reached the ship, they said to the priest, "Please Father, help us again. After you left, we forgot the right method of saying the prayer. So we have come to request you to teach it to us again." The father looked at them and said, "Whatever you are doing is right. The right method which I taught you did not work, but whatever you are doing is the right method because it has given you innocence of the heart and connected you with the Lord." That is shraddha, faith.

In how many ways was the faith of Prahlada tested?

Swami Sivananda: Look at the surrender and faith of Prahlada in God! He had completely resigned himself to Hari. No other thought save that of God occupied his mind. He received the full grace and benediction of God, even though he was ill-treated by his father in a variety of ways. He was hurled down from the top of a cliff, trampled by an elephant, and poisoned. Cobras were tossed upon him; he was thrown into the sea with his legs in iron chains. His nose was filled with poisonous gas; he was thrown into a fire and boiling oil was poured over his head. Yet Prahlada's faith in God was not shaken in any way; the name of Narayana was always on his lips.

What is the importance of faith?

Swami Niranjanananda: Faith is generally translated as having belief in something, having a certain conviction which may not seem logical. It is believing that things can happen, things can change and things can be attained. It is this subtle, internal, unmanifest feeling that becomes the basis

for spiritual growth, because when faith becomes logical and known, then the concept of miracles is separated from it. A miracle means something that is a natural manifestation of Prakriti and Purusha. For people who have never seen TV, it is miraculous.

Faith is a feeling of deep inner security and satisfaction which is necessary in order to boldly take another step. Faith becomes the motivating force which keeps the energy and spirits high. In times of difficulty and need, it is only faith that brings one out of that circumstantial condition; the certainty that something will happen to make things all right. When things do become all right for a person who is emotional and devotional by nature, it may appear as an act of God or one's ishta devata. For an intellectual it may seem as if a miracle has happened. It can take on different meanings for different people.

Yoga considers faith to be the motivating force which propels one to the realization of one's true nature. Faith in Sanskrit is *shraddha*, and one of its meanings is to be in the vicinity of truth. From this angle, faith becomes the motivating factor for and the basis of evolution and growth – mentally, externally, internally and in every sense.

To develop faith one has to learn to let oneself go. The moment one does this one will have faith. One should have freedom of personal expression, without any inhibitions, yet within the limits of dharma, within the limits of preordained universality. This free expression of human nature within the limits of dharma is faith. This does not mean that one can say, "Oh, I can express myself fully and not care about anybody, about any culture or nation," which would, in every way, create disharmony. Balanced expression will eventually allow one to let go of the archetypes, the impressions stored inside, and then there will be faith.

How does the story of Raidas exemplify the power of faith?

Swami Satyananda: A friend of his was going to Varanasi, so he asked Raidas if he would accompany him. Raidas

answered, “No, I cannot come. I am a cobbler and I am very poor.” Instead he gave his friend some pieces of *haldi*, turmeric, to offer to Ganga. His friend went to Varanasi and he had his bath in the Ganga. Forgetting to offer the turmeric which Raidas had given to him, he started off on his return journey. All of a sudden he heard a voice behind him, saying, “Haldi, haldi.” When he turned around, he saw two hands rising from the Ganga. It was a miracle – Gangaji was asking for the turmeric from Raidas.

Such faith and belief are the greatest human qualities. It has been said in the *Ramacharitamanas*:

Devotion to Sri Rama
Is a life-restoring medicine
And intense faith its vehicle.

Intellect does not make a person unique. One is great due to faith and belief, not because of intellect. One has faith and belief, therefore, one is a superior human being. If one is without faith and belief and possesses only reasoning and calculation, then one is merely a sound box, fit for nothing. Faith is power and it can work miracles. There is no such thing as blind faith. Blind faith is a phrase coined by rascals.

What prevents faith from blossoming?

Swami Niranjanananda: Faith will only appear when ‘I’ does not exist. Faith will disappear when ‘I’ comes into existence because ‘I’ always represents the intellect, the logical dimension, whereas faith represents the universal dimension which connects a human being with the transcendental Self, without the imposition of any religious ideology, dogma or ritual. Faith is spontaneous connection and remembrance.

A mother is always aware of her child’s movements. She does not sit staring at the child all day to express her love and affection. She just has spontaneous awareness. It is that kind of remembrance which is cultivated as faith in the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, based on the connection of the individual soul and the transcendental Self. Faith is the

doorway between the room of individuality and the room of universality. That is the door which has to be opened.

What is the basis of life?

Swami Satyananda: The most important things on the path of bhakti are faith and belief. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:2), Sri Krishna says: “Those who, fixing their mind on Me, worship Me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, these I consider to be perfect in yoga.” Faith and belief, or faith and trust, are the basis of bhakti. They are also the basis of one’s life. If somebody were to say that you have blind faith because you have accepted your father as your own father without any proof, then you would regard that person as mad. Faith and belief are the foundation of our life, family, society, and also of bhakti. Even a great saint or intellectual devoid of inner trust and belief is a faithless person.

A faithless person is like a beautiful woman adorned with ornaments but completely naked. Similarly, most intellectuals are rich in ornaments but naked otherwise. Intellect is not the basis of life. Faith and belief are innate qualities in every individual. Without faith and belief one would not survive even for a single day. Faith and belief provide an individual with an identity. Faith and belief are the basis of everyone. When a girl marries she goes to a strange house. She has to adapt and make it her own home because she has to live there for the rest of her life. While she stays there as a mistress, what is the basis of her strength and support other than faith and belief?

In fact, one cannot survive without faith and belief which are the greatest human qualities. If they are channeled properly towards God, life will be full of bliss and wonder, and the journey of life will be completed successfully. This is the best way. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna has declared (9:3): “Men devoid of faith in the dharma do not attain Me, O oppressor of foes, but return to the path of the mortal world.”

Is it possible to be healed through faith?

Swami Satyananda: I have no doubt that one can be healed due to faith. Many have been healed in this way. Faith is something that everyone can develop. It is a natural quality; one just has to manifest it. One does not have to cultivate faith; it is already there. One may have to cultivate and develop intellect, but not faith. Faith is inherent. Where there is no question, there is acceptance with reason. Belief and faith are inborn virtues of human beings. Intelligence is not inborn; intelligence is developed in school, college or from text books. No one can give faith and belief.

There are many things in life which are based on faith and belief. In marriage, for example, the girl goes to an unfamiliar house where she has never been before. She accepts someone as her husband, saying that they have been together for many births, and they become united. She looks after his children, she becomes a partner in his sorrow and happiness and she loves him. Romance is also there; everything happens. The basis is respect, belief and faith. Without faith, the father is not the father and the husband is not the husband. Without faith a man is broken. He is a person without a head, full of doubts: “Will she leave me, will she betray me?” If he feels like this, he must change. The basis of bhakti yoga is belief and faith, which are both within. Everyone has the raw materials: *astha*, faith and *vishwas*, belief. Now they have to make the finished product – bhakti.

What are the objects of faith?

Swami Niranananda: The word shraddha does not apply to faith in just any object or person. It is a faith which is connected only with God, guru and truth. This is the shraddha that needs to be intensified.

There is a story in the Upanishads. Once, there was a drought in a kingdom. There had not been any rain for years. Animals were dying, the fields were dry, the earth was cracking and people were migrating to other places. The

king thought, “My kingdom will become empty if there is no rain. It will become a barren land, a barren kingdom.” He asked his wise men what could be done. They advised him to perform a yajna to please Indra, the god of rains.

The yajna was begun. People from all over the kingdom came to participate in it. The day the yajna was scheduled to culminate, a little boy reached there holding an umbrella over his head. Everyone started to laugh at the sight, “What a mad boy, he has come with an umbrella while there is a drought! There is not a single cloud anywhere in the sky, only the scorching sun, and this boy stands with an umbrella!”

The boy replied, “Who are you laughing at? There is a drought in your kingdom and you are performing a yajna to invoke rain, but you do not have any faith in it. If you had faith, then you would have received the fruits of the yajna by now. I have come with the faith that at a place where all the citizens of the kingdom have gathered to pray for rain, there will certainly be rain.” The moment the boy uttered these words, the sky filled with clouds and there was such torrential rain that the entire yajna venue was washed away. Everyone ran hither and thither soaking wet. Only this boy stood dry under his umbrella.

This is known as faith. The faith of one little boy swayed the throne of the king of gods, yet the yajna performed by thousands could not achieve anything for their sentiments were not connected with it. That is the reality of people’s lives also. They perform actions but their sentiments are not connected with them. They may have belief, but not faith. Their faith is not aflame. Faith has to be intensified through viveka and protected through reflection.

Faith is an encounter with truth. The emotion, the sentiment, the thought whose basis is truth is called faith.

No Greater Power than Faith

In the dictionary of faith
There is no such word as impossible.

With full faith and conviction, I say,
“Nothing is impossible.”

With full faith and conviction you can be anything in life,
Regardless of what you are today.

Faith will never fail,
As it is deeper than thought, belief and intellect.

Faith will never fail,
As it is an expression of the inner spirit.

Once you realize faith, you realize God.
So tell me, what is impossible?

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*



6

Who are the Bhaktas?

The bhakta accepts all that comes as a gift intended to lift him into the deeper realms of awareness.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

DEFINING A BHAKTA

Who can tell who is a bhakta?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti does not only depend on outer expression. It depends on inner feeling. A person who quietly does his daily work can just as easily be a bhakta as a person who sings devotional songs throughout the night and day. Only a bhakta can know that he is a bhakta.

How are bhaktas described in the *Bhagavad Gita*?

Swami Sivananda: Four types of bhaktas and upasakas have been identified according to their attitudes and qualities. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (7:16):

*Chaturvidhaa bhajante maam janaah sukritino'rajuna;
Aarto jijnaasurartharthethee jnaanee cha bharatarshabha.*

Four kinds of virtuous men worship Me, O Arjuna. They are the distressed (artha), the seeker of knowledge (jignasu), the seeker of wealth (artharthi) and the wise (jnani).

The distressed is one who is suffering from a chronic and incurable disease, one whose life is in jeopardy due to an earthquake, volcanic eruption, thunder, and attack by bandits, an enemy or a tiger. Artha is the distressed devotee who suffers and craves the grace of God in order to be relieved from pain and sorrow. He performs different worships in order to receive God's grace and be relieved from suffering on account of disaster, failure, loss or harassment, and others. When Draupadi and Gajendra were in great distress they worshipped Sri Krishna. These are instances of *arta bhakti*.

The seeker of knowledge is the *jignasu*, the enquirer, who is dissatisfied with this world and feels there is a void in his life. He always feels that sensual pleasure is not the highest form of happiness and there is yet pure eternal bliss, unmixed with grief and pain, which is to be found within. The *jignasu* seeks higher knowledge and wisdom because he feels that he is ignorant in spiritual matters. Janaka was a devotee of this type. Uddhava was a *jignasu*. He was dissatisfied with the world and received wisdom from Sri Krishna. Sugriva, Vibhishana, Upamanyu and Dhruva were all devotees of this type.

The *jnani* is a man of knowledge who has attained self-illumination. He is the wise *bhakta* who seeks God without any expectations and realizes that God is within himself and everything around him. The *jnani* ultimately attains *para bhakti*, supreme devotion, and performs worship by constant renunciation of all karmas and actions, with awareness constantly fixed upon the Supreme. He is ever united in bliss with the Divine. A *jnani* is firm in his vow of realization of the Supreme and is the enlightened soul who constantly worships God as the one essence in all forms. The wise are men of knowledge who have attained self-illumination. Sukadeva was a *jnani bhakta*.

Vaira *bhaktas* are negative *bhaktas*. They do not have positive devotion for God. They hate God and thus remember Him always. Hatred also requires constant remembrance

of the enemy. So they are a kind of bhakta also. They attain salvation through *vaira bhakti*. Kamsa, Shishupala and Ravana thought of Sri Rama constantly due to fear and hatred, *vaira bhakti*. Hence they are also regarded as devotees.

What are the four types of bhaktas?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Krishna says that there are four kinds of people who worship him: artha, jignasu, artharthi and jnani, “An *artha* devotee prays for relief from calamities which have befallen him. A *jignasu* is one who wants to know Me in earnest. An *artharthi* is one who worships Me with a desire or intention for fulfilment in mind, in order to attain something. A *jnani* is one who accepts Me as the reality which I am. It is the jnani who is dear to Me and who can attain Me.”

Please elaborate on the different motives of the four types of bhaktas.

Swami Satyananda: Artha bhaktas worship God for relief from distress, sorrow, sickness or incurable disease. These devotees ask God for help or a solution when they are in a fix, in misery or beset with problems. When they become desperate, helpless, agonized and frightened, they remember God and surrender to Him to overcome their crisis. For example, a person may be dragged into a court case; there may be an official enquiry by the government against him; he may have income tax problems; his young son may fall sick. There are countless predicaments and problems that may confront a person. When such a person turns to God because he is caught in a calamity, he is called a desperate devotee.

Most people in the world belong to this category. When things are going wrong they go to the temple or church and pray to try to express their devotion. When the distress or difficulty is gone, often they again forget and when there are no difficulties they don't even do their japa every day.

Those who pray to God for wish fulfilment, for a son or money, are called artharthi bhaktas. These devotees desire

something that they are unable to attain in life. They turn to God to ask for something, to beg. For example, people desire a son because they believe that otherwise there will be no future breadwinner in the family or anyone to perform the last rites after death. So they want a son to earn money, to support the father and provide for his wellbeing during the onward journey after death. A son is believed to buy a ticket for the father's posthumous journey by performing his last rites.

Some people also worship God to ask for a job, for prosperity in business, to pass exams and so on. Such bhaktas are called devotees with desire; they have an axe to grind. These are selfish bhaktas who seek gratification of their personal desires from God.

Those who are inquisitive about God, who want to enquire about truth, are jignasu bhaktas. Jignasu bhaktas are curious to know what God is. Their devotion to God is motivated by a search into reality, into the nature of God and the soul. They want to know what rebirth is. Such devotees are limited in number, but there are some like this. They leave their homes and the temptations of material life to enquire into God and spirituality. They have a spiritual goal.

When I started off on the spiritual path I was inspired by this type of devotion. I was beset with transcendental questions such as what is life, what is the nature of the world, where does man come from, where does he go after death, what is the sun, what is the moon, what is creation? The jignasu devotee has a questioning mind and seeks knowledge about God by every means available: singing bhajans in praise of God, doing kirtan or japa, performing austerities, practising meditation or pratyahara, withdrawing from the world of the senses. Such devotees try out dharana, dhyana and samadhi, prompted by the urge to know God. The number of such devotees is not large. Most people belong to the first two categories, which contain the highest percentage of humanity.

Those who are saturated with subtle knowledge and discrimination are called jnani bhaktas. Out of all these

bhaktas, the fourth type of bhakta is considered to be superior because he practises bhakti only for the sake of bhakti.

How do the different types of devotees worship?

Swami Satyananda: There are the four types of devotees who worship God. That worship is called *aradhana*, which means worshipping God by chanting His name, singing His glory, performing pooja to Him with ritualistic precision, or by mental absorption. Ritualistic precision means with articles of pooja like the conch, bell, flowers and leaves. God can also be worshipped at the mental level without these external means. Reading *Hanuman Chalisa*, *Ramacharitamanas* or singing kirtan are also forms of worship.

Whenever God is remembered, whenever He is worshipped with any of the aforesaid attitudes, it becomes aradhana. One may cry out to Him in adversity to remove one's sorrows and sufferings, ask Him to fulfil one's wishes, turn to Him for knowledge about Himself, or one may love Him just for the sake of love. These types of worship are called aradhana. One type of devotee prays to God to save him from a crisis, the second type begs Him to fulfil his wishes and desires for wealth and happiness, the third type questions God for knowledge and divine experience, and the fourth type seeks His love for its own sake. These devotees remember God and worship Him with different motives, but what they do constitutes aradhana.

What are examples of bhaktas experiencing transcendental devotion?

Swami Niranjanananda: One who practises the higher form of bhakti does not belong to this world. When St Teresa of Avila used to go into inner ecstasy, the stigmata would appear on her hands. When Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to communicate with the Divine Mother, he would lose body consciousness totally and people would call him a madman.

When a bhakta's love becomes intense, how is his personality affected and what is the outcome of this?

Swami Satyananda: Intensity of emotions means that an emotion felt within is in excess. Greed and desire also appear as intense emotions. If desire, anger and greed can reach a point of excess, bhakti can also reach a point of excess. There comes a time when it becomes too much. At this point, there is no doubt in the mind, only knowingness.

Mirabai was given a wooden statue of Krishna by a wandering mendicant, and she thought that Krishna was her husband. What kind of a mind is this? Even a small girl will say, "How can a doll be my husband?" She will have a doubt. Doubt means the existence of two thoughts: this is a statue of Krishna; this is not my husband. Mirabai did not have any doubt. This is a certain kind of mind, which is one-pointed.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa was married at the age of twelve or thirteen, but he never considered his wife as a wife. He always considered her as a Mother. A person like that does not have any doubt. One who has single awareness has only one emotion. It is a different kind of mind. Forget about adults, even an ordinary child cannot have a mind like that. It is an intense state of bhakti where the personality turns into something else. In that state where the emotions reach an acute intensity, the person becomes so simple that the God who is hidden within becomes visible outside.

In what way can a false sense of bhakti manifest?

Swami Sivananda: People shed false tears through habitual lachrymal irritation. These are not the sincere teardrops of divine love of a devotee. Sometimes a person feigns to be a devotee and sheds false tears just to make his neighbours think that he is a great devotee, and due to sympathetic actions his neighbours also begin to weep. A band of weeping people can be seen in a sankirtan gathering, but in their hearts there will not be an iota of devotion.

Devotion is a rare gift from God. Weeping is not in itself a criterion by which to judge the devotional nature of a man or

a woman. Do not mistake the crocodile tears of a hypocrite for the genuine pearl drops of divine love which inspire and elevate the bystanders. One may not weep outwardly and yet be a genuine silent devotee. May this earth be free from pseudo-parabhakti aspirants. May the world abound with real, thirsty, sincere, humble devotees, who can charge everything with faith, devotion, joy and bliss.

Why can wicked people still be bhaktas?

Swami Niranjanananda: The most difficult undertaking in this world is to change one's nature. It is like a dog's tail – always curled up. If one ever wants to know one's own nature in an unbiased way, then one should look at a dog's tail. One's nature is exactly the same. If anyone wants to straighten a dog's tail, they will put it in a pipe, and as long as it is in a pipe, it will remain straight.

When a disciple is in the company of the guru, he tries his best to keep his tail straight, yet the moment he is away from the guru, the tail curls up again and he goes back to his usual nature. If a demon becomes a bhakta or a devotee, his nature will remain that of a demon, for bhakti has nothing to do with the *vrittis* or modifications of the mind. The bhakti tradition has spoken of different *bhavas* or feelings with which one can connect to God. These bhavas include *vaira bhava*, enmity; *madhurya bhava*, love; *sakhya bhava*, friendship; and *dasya bhava*, the attitude of a servant.

People think that Kamsa and Ravana were wicked people. They were wicked, yet they were bhaktas. Krishna had pervaded Kamsa's mind, even before taking birth. Every day Kamsa would remember him at least once and wonder where he was, thinking, 'Whether alive or dead, he is my nemesis'. When God is remembered constantly with the feeling of fear or hatred, that is also bhakti. Even if one has hatred or enmity towards God, one remembers Him by these feelings. This is why bhakti has no specific rules.

In bhakti, it is not necessary to be a saintly person. One can offer faith, devotion and worship in any form. In the

Puranas there are stories of people who did not change their depraved lifestyle, yet when they called out to God just once with a pure heart, they received His blessings. This is why, according to the rishis and munis, the path of bhakti is the best and simplest method in this Kali Yuga. It does not have to be taught to anyone. No one had to go to school to learn how to get angry and cultivate hatred or jealousy. These abilities come spontaneously. Similarly, one does not have to ask anyone how to practise bhakti.

What are the characteristics of a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: The characteristics of a devotee who has attained the realization of oneness are described in the following verse of the *Bhagavad Gita* (10:9):

*Machchittaa madgatapraanaa bodhayantah parasparam;
Kathayantashcha maam nityam tushyanti cha ramanti cha.*

With their mind and their life wholly absorbed in Me, enlightening each other and ever speaking of Me, they are satisfied and delighted.

The devotee constantly thinks of God. His very life is absorbed in Him. He has consecrated and completely dedicated his whole life to the Divine. According to another interpretation, all his senses, which function because of prana, such as the eyes, are absorbed in Him. The bhakta takes immense delight in talking about Him, about His supreme wisdom, power, might and other attributes. He feels intense satisfaction and is delighted as if he is in the company of his Beloved who is God.

How does Sage Sandilya describe the signs of a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: Just as one infers love in people from their words, gestures, looks, tears, thrills of joy, so also one can infer devotion to God from external signs. In the *Bhakti Sutras of Sandilya*, Sage Sandilya lists these signs (sutras 43–45):

*Tatparishuddhishcha gamyaa lokavallingebyah.
Sammaanabahumaanapreetivirahetaravichikitsaamah
imakhyaatiladārtha-praanasthaanatadeeyataasarvatad
bhaavaapratikoolyaaadeeni cha smaranebhyo baahulyaat.*

Perfect purity of devotion is to be known from external marks, that of the love of ordinary people.

The marks of devotion to God can be known from remembering the words and acts of great devotees such as honour, great reverence, delight, grief in separation, aversion to everything else, constant singing of the glory of the Lord, preservation of life for His sake only, the feeling that everything belongs to Him alone, the idea that He is all in all, entire absence of opposition to Him and His will, and the like. (43–44)

There are examples of these signs in bhaktas. Arjuna honoured Sri Krishna. Ikshvaku showed reverence even to the clouds which had the colour of Sri Krishna. Vidura had delight in the presence of Sri Krishna. The Gopis experienced sorrow in separation from Sri Krishna. Upamanyu had aversion to everything else other than God. Sage Narada is constantly singing Narayana's name. Hanuman preserved his life for Sri Rama only. Prahlada had the idea that everything belonged to Narayana only. Bhishma had no enmity towards Sri Krishna when he advanced to kill him.

Dveshaadayastu naivam.

But hate, etc., are not so. (45)

Anger, jealousy, hatred, greed and other negative qualities do not exist in God's devotees.

How does Sage Narada describe the signs of a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* it is said (sutras 68–69):

*Kanthaavarodharomaanchaashrubhih parasparam
lapamaanaah paavayanti kulaani prithiveem cha.*

*Teertheekurvanti teerthaani sukarmee kurvanti karmaani
sachchhaastreekurvanti shastraani.*

Conversing with one another with a choking voice, with hairs standing on end, with tears flowing from their eyes, they purify their families as well as the earth (the land which gave birth to them).

They (such devotees) impart sanctity to places of pilgrimage, render actions righteous and good and give spiritual authority to scriptures. (68–69)

When there is congregational prayer, when devotees meet to do kirtan and common meditation, they generate a spiritual current or force which inspires and purifies the hearts of many. The whole atmosphere of that place gets purified and is surcharged with currents of divine love.

The greater the bhakti is, the greater the orbit of the spiritual influence. The greatest of them are the light of the whole universe. Even if they live in caves, the spiritual waves generated by their devotion will spread over the entire universe and find an echo in all pure hearts ready to receive them.

Choking voice, hairs standing on end and tears flowing from the eyes are external marks of the internal emotion. They express intensity of feeling. This feeling is *prem* or divine love. He who has such *prem* can have direct communion with God.

The devotees turn ordinary bathing places into sacred places of purification, ordinary acts into pious deeds and words of instructions into holy texts. Their presence adds holiness to the place where they live. Their thoughts are dynamic. They transform their environments, infusing them with peace and joy.

Vrindavan and Mathura are sacred because of Sri Krishna. Ayodhya is holy because of Sri Rama. Naimisaranya in North India is still visited by thousands of pilgrims on

every New Moon day, because many rishis of olden days dwelt there. It is the saint who constitutes the real tirtha. That which enables a person to cross over obstacles, such as a boat on a river, is a *tirtha*.

The stones on which saints sat, the paths on which they have trodden, the villages through which they have passed, the lakes in which they have taken baths, the trees under which they have taken food are sanctified.

What are the experiences of saints and bhaktas?

Swami Satyananda: Tulsidas did not write the *Ramacharitamanas*; it was written through him. The *Ramacharitamanas* is not poetry but *shruti*, that which is heard in meditation. The Vedas are not poetry, nor literature; they are shruti. If I tell you to take dictation and you do, then you will have written the essay; however, I am the one making you write it. Tulsidas was made to write the *Ramacharitamanas* in the same way. I have never read another book like the *Ramacharitamanas*. I have read a wide range of books. I have read the Bible many times, and the Koran. I have read Plato and all kinds of philosophical and spiritual literature. However, I get such joy from reading the *Ramacharitamanas*, like a child running to its mother's lap, or the joy of a husband and wife embracing, or the joy a dusty and worn traveller gets in an air-conditioned room. One does not have to understand it to feel such joy. Tulsidas had an extremely difficult life. His mother died giving birth and very soon after, the nurse who cared for him died. There was no one to look after him. Like the urchins in Sealdah station, he roamed here and there until a sadhu took him under his wing.

Tulsidas was a great Sanskrit scholar. He would write a poem in the evening; however, it would disappear by the morning. God did not want him to write in Sanskrit. He wanted him to write in his own language so that everyone could read it. Why did Swami Vivekananda not write in Bengali? Who would have read it? Why did Swami Sivananda not write in Tamil? Who would have read it? Similarly, I did

not write in Hindi. I wrote in English and today everyone is reading it. God makes you write in the language of the age.

Sri Aurobindo knew Greek, Latin, Bengali and Sanskrit, but he was made to write in English so that the educated people could read it and could question it. Only then, the knowledge could be spread and propagated. If he had written in Bengali, what would have been achieved? Similarly, God said to Tulsidas, “What can you achieve by writing in Sanskrit?” and so He had him write in Hindi, the same Hindi that was spoken in the villages. The dialects of Hindi are stronger and more widely spoken than the language itself. Brajabhasha, Maithili, Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Angika, Bundelkhandi are all dialects of Hindi, and more widespread than Hindi. This is why *Ramacharitamanas* has been so widely popular.

Saints are those who experience the innermost, unknowable and unmanifest principle, that which is beyond vision, which is beyond normal thoughts and experiences, that which you cannot see and you cannot touch. It is an experience which happens only in a certain state and it does not last very long. It is like lightning. It is also called God-experience, having the vision of God, or *nirvikalpa samadhi*. This does not last for an hour or two, no; it comes and goes in the wink of an eye. It is the same experience that Kakabhushundi had in Rama’s stomach, and what Yashoda experienced in Sri Krishna’s mouth. Sri Krishna gave Arjuna the experience of aeons and ages while sitting on the chariot in the battlefield, yet Arjuna felt it happened in the blink of an eye. A person who has an experience like that is a saint. The rest of us are wise intellectuals, but not saints. Rishis and munis have been trying for this fleeting experience for thousands of years. Some died, some had the experience and many did not.

What is the importance to ordinary people of the lives of great saints such as Swami Sivananda?

Swami Satyananda: It has been said by Henry Longfellow, one of the inspired poets of our times, that the ‘lives of great men all remind us we can make our life sublime.’ They

leave footprints on the sands of time, and we follow in those footprints. Millions and millions of people have been born into the world as pilgrims, but they have not been able to see the footprints of great men because the winds of passion and ignorance have wiped them away. People who live in this beautiful part of the twentieth century are really fortunate because they can still see these footprints with their own eyes.

When Swami Sivananda lived, he led a life of completeness and homogeneity, and possessed what could be rightly called an integrated personality. To this day the whole world is obliged to him for the great knowledge of the path he has shown to millions of seekers in every part of the globe.

To talk about saints is not an easy matter. They are like icebergs – one can only see a small part of them above the water, the rest is hidden. Therefore, it is definitely not possible for me to make an accurate assessment of the personality of Swami Sivananda, with whom I lived for only a short period of time, but who was responsible for changing the whole current and concept of my life.

What is the role of saints?

Swami Satyananda: If there were no saints, gurus or swamis, and there were nobody to teach the higher qualities, human beings would just be animals that can speak and think, that is all. Today they are able to think about God and spiritual matters on account of those great people who have attained unity.

If they also attain unity with the higher Self, they may not be able to supply bread to their people, they may not be able to do social services, but these services are just a fraction of man's need. The real need of humanity is to develop in the light of divinity and to shed the animal in him so the divine may be revealed.

Thousands of saints and illumined people, devotees and aspirants have come during the course of history. They have guided humankind from darkness to light and they have given man a concept of higher life. They have preached compassion instead of violence, unity instead of dissension

and love in place of hatred. These people who have attained unity teach something important, and through their teachings the world becomes better than before. If it weren't for these illumined saints, people would not have realized that compassion and love are higher virtues.

The purpose of an avatar like Buddha or Christ is to present himself as embodiment of the supreme spirit and to guide the bhaktas and devotees.

THE JNANI BHAKTA

Who is a true bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: Only a jnani is a true, selfless bhakta, flooded with the majesty and grandeur of emotionless peace. The highest kind of bhakta is one who wants nothing from God. He merely wants God. He says, "O Lord! I want you. Nothing else do I want. What is there which I have to get after getting you, the source and root of everything?" When wheat is obtained, then all its preparations are also obtained. When gold is obtained, all ornaments of gold are also obtained. When God is attained, everything else is attained. The devotee is lost in the consciousness of God. He has plunged into the ocean of bliss, he has taken a bath in the sea of nectar, he has drunk deep of the essence of immortality, he has become one in whom all desires have been fulfilled, for he has attained God. He is eternally united with Him. God is dearest to him and he is dearest to God.

Why is the jnani upasaka superior to the other bhaktas?

Swami Satyananda: Gradually, believers in God should become jnani bhaktas. The *Bhagavad Gita* says (7:18):

*Udaaraah sarva evaite jnaanee tvaatmaiva me matam;
Aasthitah sa hi yuktaatmaa maamevaanuttamaam gatim.*

They (the three first types of bhaktas) pray, they give their heart to me, they believe in Me, but so far as the jnani is concerned, he is My Atma.

It is better to be a jnani bhakta. So far as worldly problems are concerned, one must sit for meditation, concentrate the mind, become one-pointed, develop the qualities of the mind, take decisions and – act!

How is the jnani devotee characterized in the *Bhagavad Gita*?

Swami Sivananda: It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (7:17):

*Teshaam jnaanee nityayukta ekabhaktirvishishyate;
Priyo hi jnaanino'nyarthamaham sa cha mama priyah.*

Of them the wise, ever steadfast and devoted to the One, excels (is the best); for I am exceedingly dear to the wise and he is dear to Me.

Ekabhaktih means unswerving, single-minded devotion to the Supreme Being. The jnani bhakta is beyond cults or creeds or formal religion or rules of society. As the wise man is constantly harmonized, and as he is devoted to the One, he is regarded as superior to all the other devotees. As I am his very Self or *antaratma*, I am extremely dear to him. Everybody loves his own Self most. The Self is very dear to everybody. The wise man is My very Self and he is dear to Me also.

Are not the other devotees dear to God? They are; they are all noble souls, but the wise man is exceedingly dear because he has a steady mind; he has fixed his mind on Brahman. He does not want any worldly object, but only the Supreme Being. He seeks Brahman alone as the supreme goal. He practises *ahamgraha upasana*, meditation on the self as the all. He tries to realize that he is identical with the Supreme Self. Therefore, I regard a wise man as My very Self.

What is the experience of being a jnani devotee?

Swami Niranjanananda: When jnana awakens, the whole world becomes filled with God. For such a jnani the whole world becomes a temple and they live their life as if they were living in a temple – with faith and belief. This is how

one finally attains liberation. This is not liberation from karmas, but *sayujya mukti*, freedom attained due to union with the supreme consciousness. Freedom from suffering is known as *karma mukti*, yet becoming one with God is known as *sayujya mukti*.

This is attained when one understands and follows the sequence of yoga and finally arrives at the point where the shelter of bhakti is found. With the help of yoga sadhana one enhances one's receptivity, and then with the help of bhakti sadhana, union with the object of worship is attained. Then every form of auspiciousness naturally descends into one's life. This is the journey of yoga.

How do jnana and bhakti complement each other?

Swami Niranjanananda: The karma which helps one realize God within is bhakti. This bhakti should have a connection with *jnana*, wisdom or knowledge. The fulfilment of *jnana* is bhakti. If this is not so then both *jnana* and bhakti are incomplete. If bhakti and *jnana* don't coexist then the form of bhakti is *sakama*, based on fulfilment of desires. However, when *jnana* is an integral part of bhakti, the final state reached is *satmaka*, union with the self, a state in which one's actions are offered to God and one does not desire the fruits of action. *Jnana* and bhakti are complementary to each other; they are not different from each other. *Jnana* means "I am That" – *Sah aham* or *So-ham*. When one realizes that the same God is within and without, it becomes a living experience, and that state of *jnana* is transformed into bhakti. Bhakti is the highest experience of *jnana*.

Who is an example of a jnani devotee?

Swami Niranjanananda: A *jnani bhakta* does not have any desire; for the *jnani bhakta*, there is only one statement, the shanti mantra of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*:

*Om poornamadah poornamidam poornaat poornamudachyate;
Poornasya poornamaadaaya poornamevaavashishyate.*

That is full, this is full. From full, the full is taken, the full has come. If you remove the full from the full, full alone remains.

The term jnani bhakta does not mean one who has studied the scriptures and literature. Sri Swami Satyananda says that one who reads and reads becomes a parrot and one who performs seva becomes Hanuman. One has to decide what one wants to become. For those who want to become a jnani like Hanuman, there is the path of seva.

There is no jnani like Hanuman and no bhakta like Hanuman. A jnani and a bhakta are the same, not different. The last stage of bhakti is that of jnana.

What are the two types of bhaktas?

Swami Niranjanananda: Traditionally, bhakti has been divided into two categories. The bhakti that establishes the relationship between the devotee and God has been called *para bhakti* and that which is influenced by material objects, desires and circumstances has been called *apara bhakti*. Aparā bhakti is worldly, para bhakti is spiritual. In aparā bhakti a person prays to God for happiness and removal of difficulties, problems and suffering. In para bhakti the devotee makes an effort to know and to realize the indestructible soul within this destructible body. Aparā and para, worldly and godly – the scriptures have spoken of these two aspects of bhakti.

Action or karma is an essential part of aparā bhakti. There are regulations that govern an aparā bhakta's life, such as chanting of specific mantras in the morning, afternoon or evening, rules for anushthana, rules for pooja, and so on. Para bhakti does not need any such ritualized actions or rules, only self-enquiry.

PARA BHAKTI AND PARA BHAKTAS

What is para bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is like the feeling the mother has for her child, the feeling the lover has for the beloved, the feeling one enemy has for another. The same intensity of feeling is experienced in bhakti. However, the intensity of bhakti called *para bhakti* is transcendental devotion. Para bhakti and *jnana*, true knowledge, are one and the same. Para bhakti means supreme devotion when there is intensity. It is not lukewarm love, it is so overpowering that nothing else exists in the mind. A devotee has said:

Love is that secret truth
Which is understood
But cannot be explained.

Some people pray to God because they are in love with Him; they are the *premi bhaktas*. This type of devotee loves God, like the gopis or Hanuman. Such bhaktas have nothing to ask of God, they have no selfish motive, they seek no benefit from God. They do not want happiness and success in life, solutions to their worldly problems or release from sorrow and suffering. They turn to God out of love for Him. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Mira were such devotees of pure love. Such devotees are a rarity.

Para bhakti and prem bhakti are one; there is no difference between them. All the saints from the beginning of creation have spoken on this point. The Sufis called it *ishq hakiki*, Christ called it divine love, Buddha called it *karuna*, Mahavira called it *ahimsa*. Chaitanya, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and many others, including Kabirdas, Nanak, Surdas and Tulsidas, all said the same thing.

How can one cultivate para bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda was free from desire, so what could he want for himself? From which hardship, sorrow, problem or suffering could he want to be

freed? Which problem could he want resolved? His bhakti was para bhakti: *Siyaramamaya saba jaga jani; karaun pranama jori juga pani* – “The whole world as Sita-Rama I know; with folded hands to you I bow.” For one who sees God in the whole world, in all creatures, what need is there to go to a temple, wave lights and ring bells? For one whose life is infused with God and who cannot even be touched, much less moved by objects, for such a devotee what need is there for the sadhana of apara bhakti? Such sadhana is needed for those who cannot free themselves from the clutches of the world, engrossed in the senses and sense objects. What need is there of *karmakanda*, ritualistic worship, for one already liberated from the world? He remains ever-blissful in that mental state. Such a person is called a *siddha*, a perfected being.

It is accepted that para bhakti belongs to a higher state of consciousness and apara bhakti is worldly. Nevertheless, there should not be a question as to which is superior or inferior. Apara bhakti is necessary, as people are limited by the senses and desires. They have not been able to develop a universal perspective. For them, apara bhakti is the first step and para bhakti is an attainment. This is the sequence everyone has to follow. In this way, there is an effort to change the direction of the mind. Apara bhakti makes the mind one-pointed, pure and clear. Therefore, one must set aside some time in the daily routine for a practice of worship.

While travelling as a child, I had the opportunity to stay in the homes of many people. Once I saw a man come out of the shower, wipe his wet body with a towel in one hand and simultaneously wave an incense stick in front of Hanuman’s picture with the other, while singing, ‘*Jai Hanuman jnana guna sagara.*’ He said, “What can I do? I do not have enough time, but I have to do something.” With this kind of attitude, how can bhakti be perfected? However, this way is not wrong either. Even if one eats merely one grain of sugar and not a spoonful, one is still managing to put it into the mouth, which gives a taste, even if it is only one grain of sweetness.

If one can bring some balance and restraint into one's life, *apara bhakti* will change into *para bhakti*. At that stage, love towards God will be natural. One's love towards God is not spontaneous due to the pull of sensory desires and cravings. As soon as one feels happiness and bliss in life, one no longer remembers God. Rahim says,

*Dukha men sumiran sab kare sukha men kare na koyā
Sukha men jo sumiran kare dukha kahe ko hoyā.*

In times of suffering, everyone remembers God, and never so in happiness.

Were one to remember God in happy times, why would one ever suffer?

What are the qualities of devotees who become *para bhaktas*?

Swami Sivananda: Bhaktas who are exclusively attached or devoted to God are the best of His devotees. The body, mind, wealth and everything else become the property of God. He lives in the world as His instrument. His mind is absorbed in God. His eyes see God everywhere and at every time. God has settled in the eyes of the devotee. No one can enter his eyes now. Even sleep has no access. It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 67):

Bhaktaa ekaantino mukhyaah.

Those who have one-pointed devotion to God for His own sake are primary (in their bhakti).

This chapter on bhaktas gives a description of one who has attained this stage of devotion known as *mukhya bhakti* or primary devotion. The word *mukhya* distinguishes the devotion of this supreme stage from the *gauna* or secondary devotion mentioned in sutra 56:

Gaunee tridhaa gunabhedaadaartadi bhedaadvaa.

Secondary devotion is of three kinds according to the qualities: sattwa, rajas and tamas; and according to the distinction of aspirants: the afflicted, the seeker after knowledge, the self-interested.

One who has attained this primary bhakti or absolute state of devotion is called a *Bhagavata* or *sant*, saint. This primary devotion is not tinged with any worldliness or selfishness. The devotee does not long even for mukti. He does not love God as a means to an end.

What are the two different kinds of bhaktas?

Swami Sivananda: There are two varieties of bhaktas. The inferior type of bhakta feels that everything is God except himself. He feels that he is the only one who is not God and all else is God. This is lower bhakti, where the presence of the ego hampers the ultimate experience.

The higher kind of bhakta feels that he himself is included in God and that he has no independent existence. His ego is rooted out completely. This is the realization of para bhakti or Vedanta. Here the emotions stop and he becomes a calm ocean without waves. His mind is stilled and it merges into the Universal Truth. This is the culmination of bhakti which supreme devotees like the Gopis of Vrindavan and Gouranga Mahaprabhu experienced.

What is the difference between para bhakti and apara bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: Bhakti is of two kinds: apara bhakti and para bhakti. Apara bhakti is lower bhakti. In apara bhakti the devotee is a neophyte. He observes rituals and ceremonies. He has no expanded heart. He is a sectarian and dislikes other kinds of bhaktas who worship other devatas.

In the *Bhakti Sutras of Sandilya*, Rishi Sandilya defines para bhakti or primary devotion as intense attachment to God (sutra 2):

Saa paraanuraktireeshvare.

Devotion is supreme love of God.

The Narada Pancharatra defines it as realization of God alone as ‘mine’, accompanied by deep love for Him without attachment to any other object in the world. It is undivided love for God in which He alone is felt as ‘mine’.

A devotee of the para bhakti type is all-embracing and all-inclusive. He has cosmic love or *vishwaprem*. The whole world is Vrindavan for him; he does not visit temples to worship. He sees God in everything, and feels that the world is a manifestation of the Divine and that all movements and actions are His lila. He has no dislike of faecal matter or dirt, for the chandala, the scavenger, the cobbler, the beggar, the prostitute or the thief. He says, “I see everywhere my sweet Lord. It is Hari who is playing the part of the prostitute, the thief, the dacoit, the scavenger!” He has an all-embracing, all-inclusive, exalted mental state. This cannot be adequately described in words. It has to be felt. Mirabai, Gouranga, Hafiz, Tulsidas, Kabirdas and Ramdas all enjoyed this state.

How can the relationship of the para bhakta with God be described?

Swami Satyananda: When the jnani says *Soham*, I am that, *Shivoham*, I am Shiva, or *Aham Brahmasmi*, I am Brahman, he feels that he has that bhavana in him. That is why para bhakti and jnana are the same. In para bhakti the bhakta dissolves himself in God.

Laila and Majnu were two lovers in Iran. Laila was a girl from a noble royal family. She loved Majnu to such an extent that she began to call herself Majnu, and Majnu began to call himself Laila. This is a mundane example but it explains the relationship between a bhakta and God. Kabirdas has aptly said:

O Lord, by searching for you everywhere,
Kabir has completely lost himself.

The drop has merged in the ocean.
How can it be recovered?

How does the para bhakta experience God?

Swami Satyananda: In para bhakti the bhakta merges totally and completely with God. He has no awareness of his own identity. He no longer thinks of himself as a bhakta. His mind is so immersed in God that he feels himself to be God. He becomes one with God. It is said in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*:

Even if the wealth of the three worlds is offered
To the devotee whose mind is totally fixed
On the lotus feet of the Lord,
Which even the gods cannot attain
In spite of long meditation and searching,
The mind of such a devotee cannot be diverted
Even for half the time taken in blinking the eyes.

When love becomes intense, when passion becomes intense, the world does not exist for you, or for anyone. Just as the world did not exist for Laila and Majnu, similarly, the world does not exist for those in love with God. For them, there are no children, brothers or sisters. Such things are useless. The traditional method of doing pooja is a different thing. In *prem bhakti* the attitude is exactly like that between Laila and Majnu, or Romeo and Juliet. The Gopis of Vraja said to Uddhava:

O Uddho, we do not number ten or twenty minds.
There was only one which went with Lord Krishna.
Now, there is none to worship God,
We have all become as lifeless,
As a body without a head.
In the hope of seeing Krishna,
Our last breath is waiting,
And can do so for millions of years.
You are the friend of the charming Krishna,

Who is the master of the whole world.
Surdas implores, let God
Fulfil the desires of the beloved.

What attitude exemplifies para bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: The sentiment of a bhakta, a devotee, and the sentiment of a person engrossed in the world of the senses, sense objects and pleasure are different. A bhakta desires nothing for himself. Once upon a time there was a sadhu who worshipped God for a long time. Pleased by his penance, God appeared before him. Now, God is also bound by habit. Whenever He meets a devotee, He says, “Ask for a boon.” Accordingly, when He appeared before the sadhu, out of habit God said, “Ask for a boon.” The sadhu had prayed not for the fulfilment of some desire, only for a vision of God. He said, “God, I don’t want anything from you. I only wanted to see you, and so I have.”

God said, “I am bound by my word. Once the words ‘Ask for a boon’ leave my mouth, you have to ask for something.” The devotee replied, “God, you are insulting my bhakti. On the one hand you are omniscient and on the other hand you are saying, ‘Ask for a boon.’ I never wanted anything. What has happened to your omniscience?”

God said, “Look here, spellbound by love I forgot who I was coming to see. You called me and I came, and still under the spell of love, I said, ‘Ask for a boon.’ Now I am bound by my word.” The sadhu replied, “If you are bound by your word, I am bound by my resolve. I did not pray to you motivated by some desire. I had resolved only to see you, to have a vision of you. That is done, so now you can go. Return to your *loka*, your realm.”

God thought, ‘Devotees I’ve met many, yet none have told to me to return to my own realm.’ God tried again, “Look, I am telling you this one last time; ask for something. I am bound by my promise, my word.” The devotee said, “You’re saying it for the last time and I already said it the very first time that I don’t want anything. You are insulting

my love. I am going; you can keep standing here.” Turning his back to God he set out on his way.

God looked with eyes filled with love at the retreating back of his devotee. He said to himself, “I have never come across such a devotee before. What shall I do? I have to give him a boon, bound as I am by my word.” He blessed the devotee’s shadow with the boon that whoever or whatever it would fall upon would become happy, prosperous, fulfilled and healthy. The sadhu did not know this. He had finished what he had set out to do, he had received the vision of God and he kept on walking. When the sadhu’s shadow fell upon a dry tree, it was revived and laden once again with leaves and fruit. The sadhu’s shadow fell upon a leper and he became free of leprosy. His shadow fell upon a blind man who regained his vision. His shadow fell upon a dead body and it came back to life. Without the sadhu’s knowledge and by God’s grace, his shadow kept working miracles. This is the nature of para bhakti.

What is the state of para bhakti like?

Swami Satyananda: In para bhakti the devotee merges himself totally and completely into the Divine. He becomes one with Him and forgets himself. Merging the three aspects of worship, worshipper and worshipped, one should go on developing continuous devotion to God with the attitude of a servant or a slave. Those devotees who are ever-attached to God are the best. When they talk about God their throats become choked with emotion, their whole body trembles in ecstasy and tears flow from their eyes.

If all the emotions can be channelled in independent devotion, then bhakti becomes very powerful. When bhakti is of great intensity, it is possible to feel the presence of the person to whom one is devoted. There are hundreds of examples of devotees who have been able to achieve this, but it is not easy for intellectuals. For those who are innocent and childlike, who don’t question too much, and who have one-pointed and unfaltering faith, this higher bhakti is possible.

However, such people are rare, and in most people the flow of bhakti is dissipated.

How can para bhakti be developed?

Swami Satyananda: Leave everything to the Divine. He does everything. He controls the thoughts, emotions, senses and everything. Know always that you are the instrument and He is the doer, whoever He is, whatever His form is.

For all upasakas, the name of God is a medicine, whether they are arti, artharthi, jignasu, jnani or premi bhaktas. It has been said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Balakanda, after doha 21, chau 1-3):

*Naama jeeha japi jaagahi jogee, birati biranchi prapancha
biyogee. Brahmasukhahi anubhavahi anoopaa, akatha
anaamaya naama na roopaa.*

*Jaanaa chahahi goodha gati jeoo, naama jeeha japi
jaanahi teoo. Saadhaka naama japahi laya laae, hohi
siddha animaadika paae.*

*Japahi naamu jana aarata bhaaree, mitahi kusankata hohi
sukhaaree.*

The yogi keeps awake by repeating His name, so do those who are detached from creation. They experience that Brahman joyfully, who is indescribable, without imperfection, having no name or form. Those who want to know His hidden movements perceive them by repeating His name with the tongue. Spiritual practitioners repeat the name, becoming totally absorbed in it. They become adepts and obtain siddhis. When people repeat the name, even extreme types of adversities and misfortunes are uprooted and they become happy. (1-3)

Does apara bhakti usually precede para bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: In bhakti philosophy, the emotional aspects of an individual are divided into two levels, the lower and the higher. The lower grade of bhakti is called apara

bhakti and the higher state of emotion is called para bhakti, the supreme or transcendental bhakti. In apara bhakti there is worshipping of God, visiting pilgrimage places, going to mahatmas and saints, reading the scriptures in which the glories of God are described. These are the things which everyone is supposed to do so that enough inner inspiration is received and the mind becomes purified and one-pointed. Then one will be able to discern for oneself that all the manifestations in this life are creations of the Divine and 'I am only an actor.

This revelation comes after practising apara bhakti for many years, provided it is done correctly, and ultimately when this realization dawns, para bhakti begins. After that, one takes one's life not as one's own but as the manifestation of the divine will. The karma that I do is divine will, the sufferings I undergo are divine will, the pleasures I enjoy are divine will. That becomes the realization and it is called para bhakti.

If apara bhakti is done unselfishly, it will culminate in para bhakti, but if apara bhakti is done selfishly, such as going to the temple or church and praying with a particular motive, that is called selfish bhakti. Gradually it must be understood that it is not fair to pray to God all the time for a wife, children, money, health. This realization will finally come and then one will start unselfish bhakti, thinking that everything belongs to Him. Ultimately, by this process, while doing all the karmas in the world, the bhakta does not accumulate the results, inspirations or influences. He becomes free of karma, of prarabdha, but this is said only of the highest bhaktas, not of those who worship in the temples.

How do the gunas relate to apara bhakti and para bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: Secondary devotion is of three kinds according to the three *gunas* or qualities – sattwa, rajas and tamas, and according to the distinction of the aspirants – the afflicted, the seeker after knowledge and the self-interested. Worship done without selfishness is sattvic devotion. Worship

done to acquire power and wealth is rajasic devotion. Worship done to injure others is tamasic devotion.

Sattwa is stainless like the crystal, *sphatikamani*. Sattwa lays the trap of happiness and knowledge; it is a golden fetter. A sattwic person compares himself with others and rejoices in his excellence. He is puffed up with his knowledge. His heart is filled with pride when he thinks that he has more comforts or more pleasant experiences. He thinks, “I am happy. I am wise” and so he is bound. This attachment to happiness is an illusion.

If there is trust in God, there is no need to ask anything from Him. He gives anything that is wanted without asking. *Gauna bhakti* or secondary devotion culminates in *mukhya bhakti*, primary devotion, which is one continuous, unbroken stream of love for God and which is devoid of all taints. The second classification is based on the difference in the motives that impel the devotee. Of the four varieties of devotees mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* (7:16), the first three are varieties of *gauna bhakti*. The fourth denotes *mukhya bhakti* in which the devotee loves God and God alone. It is love for love’s sake.

Rajasic bhakti practised in order to obtain power and wealth is better than tamasic bhakti, which involves divine help to injure others. Sattwic bhakti is still higher, for it only aspires to know God. Sattwa is harmony, peace, light; it is the highest state. The desire for pleasure and power, *rajas*, is better than inertia, *tamas*, which is equivalent to spiritual death. A devotee should carefully watch his mind and note which of these conditions prevails. He should strive to increase sattwa by satsang, japa, kirtan, meditation and worship.

Does the intense love of a para bhakta depend on karma or destiny?

Swami Satyananda: It does not depend on destiny or on horoscopes. It does not depend on anyone but Him. If He wants to, He will give that intense love. Bhakti can only be

gained by the grace of God, not from the scriptures and not by any practice. No method exists to attain para bhakti. Going on pilgrimages, visiting temples, fasting, having satsang with the guru and doing pooja will awaken mild bhakti and one will begin to feel good, but it will not be para bhakti.

Para bhakti is not ordinary love; it is extremely intense bhakti. It is the divine love which Mirabai, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and many others realized. For twenty-four hours of the day, whether eating, drinking, sleeping or awake, they were lost in this love. This state of para bhakti can be attained only through God's grace. There is no other way mentioned in the shastras. There is a reference in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* to the daughter of the king of Kaushal, Nagnajiti Satya. When Sri Krishna knew her vow and reached Ayodhya, she started thinking:

How can He be pleased with me,
The dust of whose feet is put on their heads
By Lakshmi, Brahma, Shankara and the Lokapalas.
He who incarnates to fulfil His promises
I am not able to please by my deeds.
Surely He is pleased due to His own grace.

What are examples of bhaktas who developed para bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Parvati practised penance and waited millennia for Shiva:

I may try and try through crores of births,
But I will marry Lord Shiva
Or remain unmarried forever.

Hanuman said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Sundarkand, after doha 31, chau 2):

*Kaha hanumanta bipati prabhu soee,
Jaba tava sumirana bhajana na hoee.*

O Lord, the real adversity is when
Your name is unremembered or unsung.

A BHAKTA'S LOVE FOR GOD

Should one pray to saints and worship them?

Swami Sivananda: Saints and sages are worthy of adoration and prayers because they have shown the ways to God-realization. The apprentice, who has just entered service in any field, is expected to have an attitude of submission and receptivity to his senior who trains him on the job, although the latter may be a person like himself.

The same is applicable in the field of spirituality. By respecting saints and following their teachings, one grows in spirituality, one learns to love and know God more adequately.

What can a human being do to show his love for God?

Swami Sivananda: It is human nature to love. The average person is mostly governed by his emotions. He feels stifled if he cannot direct his love towards some object or other, if not a human being, at least an animal, a dog or a cat. This sort of love is gross, false, illusory and unworthy in the end, but the pursuit of God through bhakti or loving devotion is the sweetest and best of human endeavours. In fact, the mobilization of human feelings in search for God is the true alchemy. The human heart panting in love for the Divine is real sublimation. Human love triumphantly seeking God for its prize is the highest virtue and excellence.

Many have been the apostles of bhakti in the annals of India's spiritual history. Even the founders of the schools of high philosophical thought have practised and preached devotion to the Lord. It is the greatest and finest of arts to love God absolutely artlessly. Its subtle technique consists in cultivating a permanent psychosis which is the stuff of the highest and best poetry, noblest philosophy, and the ultimate aim of arts, sciences and religions. Psychology applied to this line of life is the rarest achievement of saints and sages.

If one can burn all the marrow of one's bones to light up the house of one's love and derive ecstatic happiness in so

doing all through one's individual existence, whether here or hereafter, if one can go on loving without ever expecting one's love to be reciprocated, nay, even if trampled down mercilessly, then take to the path of bhakti. As such bhakti is self-recompensing. Its sweetness enriches with every fiery ordeal one passes through like perfume that grows more intense with the crushing of the rose. In the essence of bhakti yoga is set forth the perfumer's rare art of squeezing the love-laden heart to yield the riches of bhakti or divine love and devotion.

How can people express their love for the Divine, with the limitations they have as humans?

Swami Satyananda: Ultimately it was decided by the ancient seers that one finds the Cosmic Being, the Supreme Being, and gives whatever love one has to Him, so that the unused treasure of love which has been misused so far in so many ways can be properly channelled to Him. Since He is infinite and can consume all the love that is given to Him, He can understand all the love one gives Him. Give love to Him in the form of play, in the form of praying, in the form of service to humanity, in the form of calm and quiet meditation, in the form of self-purification or in the form of chanting His name, day in and day out. Give Him love in any manner you can, He is able to consume it, because He is eternal and infinite. This is the concept of bhakti, which is one of the wonderful methods of bringing man to normal behaviour.

What is the intention of expressing this love to God?

Swami Satyananda: The purpose of this communication with God is not for the meaningless fulfilment of one's wishes or for the superficial type of bhakti. It is not for any reason. Love is only for love, that is all. Why does one love? For the sake of love. Similarly, bhakti is only for the sake of bhakti.

The best relationship a person can have with God is one of love. This is the first and foremost duty of a sannyasin, for

which he has left his family, kith and kin, hearth and home. If he has forgotten this, only God can save him. I never forgot, not even for a day. There is a song by Rabindranath Tagore:

I am sitting here, waiting to be surrendered
Into the hands of love.
Therefore, much delay has been caused,
And I have committed many offences too.
They come to bind me with the string
Of rules and regulations –
But I escape somehow.
If I must be punished for this offence,
I will gladly accept it.
For I am sitting here
After being sold into the hands of love.
People may speak ill of me.
I bow down before all,
Accepting the burden of blame.
The day is about to end,
Buyers and sellers have all gone.
Those who came to call me
Have also returned disappointed.
I am left sitting here alone,
For I have been sold
Into the hands of love.

What does it mean ‘to remember God’?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is the path of love, and the path of love is the path of remembrance. The path of remembrance is only possible when one loves someone, and when one remembers him or her, that is the only person who exists. It is not actually what is called a vision. If God has never been seen, how can one believe in him? How can one love him? If one has seen God, one can love him. Those who have inborn faith and love for God should always go through the path of bhakti.

Can one start with worldly experiences to develop a higher love?

Swami Satyananda: This is an important question and a difficult one. Love is natural to every human being. Everyone practises it – people love their children, their parents, husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend. Love is so absorbing; it consumes the entire attention so that the mind becomes one-pointed. When one is full of passion, hatred or affection for one's children, the total mind is consumed and nothing else can get into one's head at that time. Therefore, it is evident that this love should be directed to God, but this cannot just be done, because in order to love somebody one has to discover a relationship that is logical.

Everybody desires love, to love and to be loved. People do not need to be taught what love is because they know already, but about how to streamline this love from matter to spirit. How can the love one has for the material world be channelled towards God? How can divine love be acquired when there are feelings for the material world?

Loving the world is running after a shadow. Loving God is running against the shadow and running after light. If the light is followed, the shadow will follow.

How can one live as a bhakta in this life of maya?

Swami Satyananda: Divine love is bhakti and worldly love is maya. How can bhakti be developed? Ramakrishna has said that it will only happen when the totality of one's experience is directed to God. The love for one's wife or husband, child or mother, wealth and property, oneself and one's life, that total love will have to be directed to God. Then He will be here and now. Swami Sivananda used to sing:

In earth, water, fire, air and ether is Ram.
In the heart, mind, prana and senses is Ram.
In the breath, blood, nerves and brain is Ram.
In sentiment, thought, word and action is Ram.
Within is Ram, without is Ram.

In front is Ram, behind is Ram.
Above is Ram, below is Ram,
To the right is Ram, to the left is Ram,
Everywhere is Ram.
Ram Ram Ram Ram Ram Ram.

Refuge, solace, path, Lord, witness is Ram.
Father, mother, friend, relative, Guru is Ram.
Support, source, centre, ideal, God is Ram.
Creator, preserver, destroyer, redeemer is Ram.
Ram Ram Ram Ram Ram Ram.

The ultimate goal of one and all is Ram.
Attainable through shraddha, prem and worship of Ram.
Accessible to devotion and surrender is Ram.
Approachable by prayer, japa and kirtan is Ram.
Hosanna to Ram, glory to Ram, victory to Ram.
Adorations to Ram, salutations to Ram,
Prostrations to Ram.
Om Sri Ram, Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram.

This song was not only Swami Sivananda's experience. Every saint has expressed the same sentiment – God is my friend, my breath, my life. When love for God becomes so deep and intense, God can be seen everywhere, just as lovers see their beloved everywhere, in everybody, the glory of God is visible everywhere. Experiencing that, one also becomes that. Wherever one looks one sees Rama. To experience that is the purpose of life. All the other activities such as study, service, fulfilling desires, rearing children and keeping accounts have to be done, but it is all maya.

What does the highest state of a bhakta's love achieve?

Swami Satyananda: In the intensity of that love the devotee becomes blind, just as when a boy is in love, nothing goes into his head no matter how his parents try to convince him. When there is intense love between God and devotee, the devotee cannot understand the things happening

around him. He only lives in the intensity of his love. If his son is sick, he does not ask God to cure him. One who is in love with God cannot think of son, daughter, father, mother, husband or wife. Love is uni-directional. An arrow does not go in two directions, a bullet does not follow two directions and love also follows only one direction. It can go either towards God or towards the world. When the bhakta reaches the highest state of love, he can force God to change His laws, but he does not do that. What will he force Him for? For his son, factory, himself? No, for him 'I' becomes insignificant; son, factory and bank balance become insignificant.

When a boy and girl fall intensely in love they cannot think of anything other than each other, and cannot hear or comprehend what their parents say. A bhakta experiences the same state. When he is immersed in love for God, he does not know that his factory is burning, his wife or child is sick or that he has cancer, for he has been blessed by love. Love is the biggest support in life. This does not need to be proven. Half the diseases occur because people feel that nobody loves them. If they come to know that their son or husband loves them immensely, what will their state be? They will find a life support.

What is love? When the mind is completely immersed in something, it is love. Some are in love with alcohol, some with poetry and some with books. Vachaspati Mishra was a scholar of philosophy who wrote scriptures of Vedanta. He did not even realize that he was married, for he was in love with scriptures, contemplation and philosophy. He did not even know what a woman was or having a child was. When the devotee's mind is completely engrossed in God, he can change the laws of God, for God becomes helpless before him. God's biggest weakness is a bhakta. This has also been said in the scriptures. God bows down before a true bhakta. He becomes weak before him the way a mother becomes weak before her child.

How does a bhakta live his life?

Swami Sivananda: The *Bhagavad Gita*, *Srimad Bhagavatam* and all sacred scriptures are guides to the path of surrender. The guru interprets the sacred scriptures and guides the devotee. There must be active cooperation with the divine plan. The aspirant must have faith in the existence of God and all actions must be done for His sake; only then are they beneficial and enduring. A devotee does not do any action which is not pleasing to God, which does not help in the growth of devotion, or which goes against the will of God.

Prahlada renounced his atheistic father; Vibhishana, his demonic brother; Bharata, his cruel mother; Vali, his preceptor; and the Gopis of Vraj, their husbands, however, they all contributed to the welfare of the world and are regarded as great devotees of God.

What is an example of a bhakta engrossed in love?

Swami Satyananda: For many years in the Rishikesh ashram I suffered from diarrhoea, dysentery, hepatitis, paratyphoid and many more illnesses, but still I did not think of leaving. I used to work very hard. That was the early period of the ashram. In order to get food I had to walk four to five kilometres in the hot sun every day and come back, and there was only one meal a day. I did not take tea and could not even get it, but I never noticed this at all, I never thought about it.

When one loves someone, difficulties are not difficult. One becomes aware of the difficulties only when there is no one to love. If one loves the guru, or anybody, even if the whole world kicks or criticizes him, he doesn't realize it. Swami Sivananda was so compassionate and peaceful that I never felt the diseases and sicknesses I suffered from. How did this happen? Was I dreaming or was I under hypnosis? When there is deep and abiding love for someone, how can one be aware of the extraneous experiences? When one is in the warm embrace of one's lover, one does not even notice the passage of time. When one is in the grip of passion and

violence, one does not think of anything else. So, when one is in the presence of the guru, how can there be awareness of oneself?

What is the ultimate of a bhakta's love?

Swami Satyananda: Love is expressed in the language of feeling and experience. If one can explain the psychological reactions one obtains from worldly love, one can also explain divine love. Love is constant remembrance and awareness of the beloved Lord and a keen longing to unite with Him.



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BHAGAVAD GITA

2. Love – Emotion of Oneness

(13:9–10) Cultivate freedom from attachment and identification with children, wife or husband, home and the rest; Constant even-mindedness amidst pleasant and unpleasant events; detachment from worldly-minded people, and constant and unswerving devotion to Me. 79

3. Devotion – Connection of Hearts

(9:34) Fix your mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice unto Me; bow down to Me; having thus united your whole self with Me, taking Me as the Supreme Goal, you shall verily come unto Me. 121

(11:54) But by single-minded devotion can I, of this Form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna. 122

(18:55) By devotion he knows Me in truth, what and who I am; then having known Me in truth, he forthwith enters into the Supreme. 123

(10:10–11) To them who are ever steadfast, worshipping Me with love, I give the yoga of discrimination by which they come to Me.

Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling within their Self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous lamp of knowledge. 124

(13:18) Thus the field as well as knowledge and the knowable have been briefly stated. My devotee, knowing this, enters into My Being. 125

(13:10) Unswerving devotion unto Me by the yoga of non-separation, resort to solitary places and distaste for the society of men. 134

5. Faith – The Fruit of Positive Emotions

(17:1) Those who set aside scriptural injunctions and sacrifice with faith, where do they stand, Krishna, in sattwa, rajasa or tamasa? 173

(17:2) The inherent faith of embodied beings is threefold: sattwic, rajasic and tamasic. Hear about it from Me. 174

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6. Who are the Bhaktas?	
(7:16) Four kinds of virtuous men worship Me, O Arjuna. They are the distressed (artha), the seeker of knowledge (jignasu), the seeker of wealth (artharthi) and the wise (jnani).	190
(10:9) With their mind and their life wholly absorbed in Me, enlightening each other and ever speaking of Me, they are satisfied and delighted.	197
(7:18) They (the three first types of bhaktas) pray, they give their heart to Me, they believe in Me, but so far as the jnani is concerned, he is My Atma.	203
(7:17) Of them the wise, ever steadfast and devoted to the One, excels (is the best); for I am exceedingly dear to the wise and he is dear to Me.	204

BHAKTI SUTRAS OF SANDILYA

6. Who are the Bhaktas?

(sutra 43–44) Perfect purity of devotion is to be known from external marks, that of the love of ordinary people.	
(The marks of devotion to God can be known from remembering the words and acts of great devotees such as honour, great reverence, delight, grief in separation, aversion to everything else, constant singing of the glory of the Lord, preservation of life for His sake only, the feeling that everything belongs to Him alone, the idea that He is all in all, entire absence of opposition to Him and His will, and the like.	198
(sutra 45) But hate, etc., are not so.	198
(sutra 2) Devotion is supreme love of God.	211

ISHAVASYA UPANISHAD

1. Bhakti Yoga and Emotions

(v. 1) All this, whatsoever moves in this universe,
Is indwelled by the Lord.
Therefore, through renunciation do you enjoy
And do not covet anybody's wealth. 57

4. Suffering and Sorrow – An Invitation of Grace

(v. 1) The world is permeated by Him and everything is His,
therefore, enjoy everything without being greedy towards the
wealth of others. 145

6. Who are the Bhaktas?

(Shanti mantra) That is full, this is full. From full, the full is
taken, the full has come.
If you remove the full from the full, full alone remains. 206

NARADA BHAKTI SUTRAS

1. Bhakti Yoga and Emotions

(sutra 55) After attaining bhakti of God, the devotee sees only
his object of devotion, hears only about Him, speaks only about
Him and thinks only of Him. 30

(sutra 65) Having once dedicated all activities to God, the
devotee should show (if at all) his desire, anger, egoism and so
on, only to Him. 53

3. Devotion – Connection of Hearts

(sutra 2) Devotion is nothing but love.
That (devotion) verily is of the nature of supreme love of God. 117

(sutra 5) By attaining which (divine love) he does not desire
anything else, neither grieves (over any loss or death of dear ones)
nor hates anything, does not indulge in sensual pleasures, nor
does he feel any urge (for the acquisition of material things). 117

6. Who are the Bhaktas?

(sutra 68–69) Conversing with one another with a choking voice,
with hairs standing on end, with tears flowing from their eyes,
they purify their families as well as the earth (the land which
gave birth to them).

They (such devotees) impart sanctity to places of pilgrimage, render actions righteous and good and give spiritual authority to scriptures.	199
(sutra 67) Those who have one-pointed devotion to God for His own sake are primary (in their bhakti).	209
(sutra 56) Secondary devotion is of three kinds according to the qualities: sattwa, rajas and tamas; and according to the distinction of aspirants: the afflicted, the seeker after know- ledge, the self-interested.	210

RAMACHARITAMANAS

1. Bhakti Yoga and Emotions

(Balakanda, after so 184, chau 2-4) In whose heart there is love of Divine nature There the Lord manifests, as it is His nature. God pervades everywhere alike. It is known that He manifests out of love. Tell me the place, time or direction Where there is absence of the Lord. He pervades the ones with and without money And yet He is apart and without attachment. God manifests himself out of love As fire manifests out of friction.	28
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2. Love – Emotion of Oneness

(Ayodhyakanda, after doha 58, chau 3) Leaving the back of the bed, lap or swing, Sita has never put her foot on the hard earth.	110
(Ayodhyakanda, after doha 122, chau 1 and 3) Rama walked in front and Lakshman followed, Both wearing the dress of an ascetic. In between Sita appeared to move gracefully, As Maya lies between Brahma and Jiva. Sita stepped in between the footprints of Lord Rama, And walked the distance as if unafraid. Lakshman stepped to the left of them, Being attentive not to place his feet On the footprints of either Sita or Rama.	111

5. Faith – The Fruit of Positive Emotions

(Balakanda, sloka 2)

I bow down to Parvati and Shiva,
Who are embodiments of faith and trust.
Without them, even the adept cannot perceive God,
Although He dwells within all alike.

168

6. Who are the Bhaktas?

(Balakanda, after doha 21, chau 1–3)

The yogi keeps awake by repeating His name, so do those who are detached from creation. They experience that Brahman joyfully, who is indescribable, without imperfection, having no name or form. Those who want to know His hidden movements perceive them by repeating His name with the tongue. Spiritual practitioners repeat the name, becoming totally absorbed in it. They become adepts and obtain siddhis. When people repeat the name, even extreme types of adversities and misfortunes are uprooted and they become happy.

215

(Sundarkand, after doha 31, chau 2)

O Lord, the real adversity is when
Your name is unremembered or unsung.

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SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

4. Suffering and Sorrow – An Invitation of Grace

(6:11:25–27) O Lord, I will not accept anything,
Be it Brahmaloaka, heaven or the empire of the world,
Or be it even the kingdom of the lower world.
I am not ready to accept even the siddhis of yoga,
Nor kaivalya, moksha or liberation itself.
As the wingless young fledglings still in the nest,
Or hungry calves of cows eagerly await their mothers,
Or as a beloved, separated from his loved one,
In a far off place remains restless to meet him,
Similar is my condition, longing again and again
For the vision of your face, beautiful as a lotus.
I do not mind bondage to the wheel of birth and death,
Which is due to my karmas that I cannot avoid.
But I wish to live ever in the company of your devotees
And have friendship with those inspired souls alone.

I do not want to form any relation with others who,
By your maya, are attached to wife, son or house. 149

YOGA SUTRAS OF SAGE PATANJALI

2. Love – Emotion of Oneness

(1:33) In relation to happiness, misery, virtue and vice, by cultivating the attitudes of friendliness, compassion, gladness and indifference respectively, the mind becomes purified and peaceful. 101

5. Faith – The Fruit of Positive Emotions

(1:20) To others this samadhi comes through faith, energy, memory, concentration and discrimination of the real. 178

Glossary

Advaita Vedanta – non-dualistic philosophy of Adi Shankaracharya based on the experience of Brahman as the Absolute Reality, the union of Brahman and atma, (the universe and the individual soul)

Ahimsa – non-violence in thought, word and deed; one of the five yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga

Anushthana – a resolve to perform a sadhana, often mantra sadhana, with absolute discipline for a requisite period of time; a fixed course of sadhana

Apara bhakti – lower form of bhakti

Aradhana – service, adoration

Artha – prosperity; material need; accomplishment; attainment in all spheres of life

Artharthi – devotee who prays to fulfil a personal desire

Ashram – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour

Ashrama – the special duties of each stage of life

Asuric – negative, destructive

Atma, atman – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life, highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul

Avatara – descent or incarnation of God to the mortal plane

Avidya – ignorance of reality; ignorance

Ayodhyakanda – second section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*

Balakanda – first section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*

Bhagavad Gita – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga

Bhagavan – God

Bhajan – devotional song

Bhakta – devotee

Bhakti – intense inner devotion in which the intellect, emotions and self are channelled towards a relationship with the divine; highest love

Bhakti Yoga Sutras – sutras on bhakti yoga, composed by Sage Narada and Sage Sandilya

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a divine relationship; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen and purify the emotions

Bhasma – sacred ashes

Bhava pradhan – person with emotions as the predominant quality

Bhava, bhavana – feeling; condition; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind

Brahmacharya – being absorbed in higher consciousness; sublimation of sexual energy for spiritual development; celibacy; conduct suitable for proceeding to the highest state of existence

Brahmacharya ashrama – first stage of life up to 25 years of age according to the ancient vedic tradition, devoted to study and learning

Brahma Sutras – famous, terse and far reaching classical vedantic text written by Sage Vedavyasa

Brahmi vritti – mental modification that leads to identification with the witnessing consciousness or Brahman; spiritual aspect of the vrittis – the self-aware, individual consciousness

Chaturmas – a four-month period during monsoon traditionally used for sadhana; from July to November

Chetana – consciousness

Chhat pooja – worship of Surya, the sun god

Chidakasha – the space of consciousness; the inner space visualized in meditation behind the closed eyes or in the region of ajna chakra

Chitta – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; storehouse of memory or samskara

Chitta vritti – disposition or state of mind inclination, feeling

Darshan – a glimpse; vision; direct perception; philosophy

Dasya bhava – feeling and attitude of relating to God as a servant

Dharma – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness

Dwesh – repulsion, aversion; hatred, enmity, dislike; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as aversion to the unpleasant; see Klesha

Gauna bhakti – culture of devotion through rituals as a preliminary stage

Grihastha ashrama – the second stage of life according to the ancient vedic ashrama tradition, i.e. household or married life from 25 to 50 years of age

Guna – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti (nature) are sattwa, rajas and tamas

Guru – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher of the science of ultimate reality who by the light of his own atma can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind and enlighten the consciousness of a devotee/disciple; preceptor

Gurukul – educational system of ancient India, where children lived in an ashram or family of the guru and were taught a comprehensive syllabus for life

Hanuman Chalisa – devotional song dedicated to Hanuman

Hridayakasha – psychic space of the heart centre where the creative hues of emotion are observed; experienced between manipura and vishuddhi chakras, associated with anahata chakra

Ichha shakti – creative force or that desire which is the first manifestation of the greater mind

Ida nadi – a major pranic channel, conducting the passive aspect of prana, the mental, lunar force or chitta shakti

Ikshvaku – first of the solar kings

Ishavasya Upanishad – the last chapter of the *Yajur Veda* which speaks of the supreme knowledge; also known as the Vedanta Upanishad as it contains the essence of vedantic philosophy

Ishta deva, ishta devata – one's personal chosen deity and form of worship

Ishwara – higher reality; God; non-changing, indestructible principle or quality

Ishwara pranidhana – cultivation of faith in the supreme or indestructible reality; surrender to God; complete dedication of one's actions and will to the Lord

Japa – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra

Jignasu – seeker

Jiva – principle of life; individual or personal soul; living being

Jivanmukta – liberated in life; an enlightened person, a person purified by true knowledge of the Supreme Reality and freed from future births while still embodied

Jnana – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life

Kaivalya – final liberation; highest state of samadhi; that state of consciousness which is beyond duality

Kala – one of the five limiting aspects of energy, restricting the creative power of individual consciousness and body; emanating ray; primal shakti; the power through which creation comes into manifestation

Kala-Kala – another name of Shiva

Kali Yuga – the present age or yuga; during this cycle man is collectively at the height of technology, decadence, dishonesty and corruption of spiritual awareness

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect

Karma Yoga – yogic path of action; union with the Supreme Consciousness through action; action without attachment to the fruits of action

Karmakanda – another name for bhakti marga; the path of ritual and worship to attain the state of bhakti

Kirtan, kirtanam – singing of God's name; practice in which a group of people sing a collection of mantras

Klesha – pain, affliction, suffering; five afflictions or causes of all suffering described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, viz avidya (ignorance), asmita (sense of 'I' identity), raga (attraction), dwesha (aversion), and abhinivesha (fear of death)

Kumbha Mela – enormous festival of bathing at four places on the river Ganga

Kundalini – the evolutionary energy in a human being; spiritual energy; Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which when awakened, awakens the chakras, resulting in progressive enlightenment

Lilas – literally, 'play'; activity of prakriti and its three gunas

Loka – locationless dimension; plane of existence, dimension

Lokapalas – a regent or guardian of a quarter of the world

Madhura, madhurya bhava – attitude of a lover of the beloved deity

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Vedavyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it

Mahat – greater mind; the total mind which includes manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara; universal intellect; see Antahkarana

Mahatma – literally, 'great soul'; used with reference to a person who has destroyed the ego and realized the self as one with all

Manas – the mind or internal organ of perception and cognition, the instrument by which objects of sense affect the soul

Mantra – words of power; sound vibrations which liberate the mind when repeated

Mrityunjaya – another name of Shiva

Mukhya bhakti – unbroken stream of love for God

Mukti – release, liberation, final absolution of the consciousness from the chain of birth and death and from the illusion of maya

Muni – one who contemplates; one who has conquered the mind; one who maintains silence or stillness of mind

Narada Bhakti Sutras – one of the main bhakti yoga texts, authored by Sage Narada

Narayana bhava – seeing God (Narayana) in others and all creation

Nirabhimanata – without a sense of ego

Nirguna – without quality or attribute; formless

Nirvikalpa samadhi – state in which the mind ceases to function and only pure consciousness remains; super-conscious state where mental modifications cease to exist, resulting in transcendence of the manifest world

Nishkama – without desire, expectation or personal interest

Para bhakti – supreme devotion, bhakti. It is said to accompany or follow the highest knowledge and to be a state of consciousness which is self-contained

Paramartha – literally, ‘the highest effort’; working for the good of others

Paramatma – cosmic Soul or Consciousness; Supreme Self; the atma of the entire universe; God

Parampara – tradition, lineage

Pingala nadi – a major pranic channel in the body, conducting the dynamic pranic force; associated with the mundane realm of experience and externalized awareness

Pooja – worship

Prakriti – individual nature; nature; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; the active principle of manifest energy

Prarabdha karma – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; previous karmas which have matured enough to give fruit

Puranas – eighteen ancient texts containing the earliest mythology of the tantric and vedic traditions

Purushartha – human attainment; self-effort; the four basic needs or desires to be fulfilled in life, viz artha (wealth), kama (desire), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation)

Purushottama – an excellent man; the highest or supreme being; an epithet of Sri Rama

Raga – passion; affection; attachment; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as attraction or attachment to what gives pleasure; see Klesha

Ramacharitamanas – a version of the *Ramayana* written by Tulsidas. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version was composed by Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in sections

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly

Sadhana Chatushtaya – four kinds of spiritual effort: 1. discrimination (viveka), 2. dispassion (vairagya), 3. the six-fold virtues (shadsampatti), 4. intense desire for liberation (mumukshutva); necessary qualifications for a student of Vedanta

Sadhu – good or holy person, sage, saint

Sakama – desire-oriented attitude, motivated by self-interest

Sakara – with form; manifest

Sakhya, sakhya bhava – attitude or way of relating to God as a friend; relationship between Arjuna and Sri Krishna

Samadhi – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of the mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga

Samarpan – surrender

- Samskara** – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way
- Sanatana dharma** – system of eternal values underlying the vedic civilization; see Dharma
- Sanatanist** – follower of Sanatana dharma
- Sankirtan** – see Kirtan
- Sannyasi, sannyasin** – one who has taken sannyasa initiation, surrendering everything to the guru and the spiritual journey
- Sanskrit** – language of the vedic civilization, still used in India and the yogic culture
- Satguru** – the guru who directs the disciple towards the truth (sat); the dispeller of darkness and ignorance (avidya); inner guru
- Satsang, satsanga** – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; spiritual association; association with the wise and the good
- Satya, satyam** – truth; speaking the truth; being truthful to oneself; honesty; one of the yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga; see Yama
- Seva** – literally, 'being That'; service; selfless service; to become one with the divine transcendental nature, and to express that nature in thought, word and deed
- Shadsampatti** – one of the four necessary qualifications for a serious spiritual aspirant according to *Aparokshanubhuti* of Adi Shankaracharya; literally, 'sixfold virtues': equanimity (sama), self-control (dama), sensory withdrawal (uparati), endurance (titiksha), faith (shraddha), constant concentration on reality (samadhana)
- Shaiva, Shavaite** – relating to the God Shiva; one who worships Shiva as the supreme reality
- Shaktas** – relating to Shakti, the Cosmic Mother; one who worships the various manifestations of shakti as the supreme reality
- Shaktipat** – direct transmission of energy and consciousness

Shaligram – black oval-shaped stone containing the preserved shell of an aquatic animal, found in Nepal; symbol of Vishnu

Shanti mantra – vedic mantra invoking peace

Shastra – an authoritative treatise on any subject, particularly science and religion; sacred book

Shishya – literally, ‘one who is under discipline’; disciple

Shiva Purana – collection of six ancient scriptures that tell the story of Shiva; see Purana

Shivalinga, shivalingam – black oval-shaped stone; symbol of Shiva; symbol of consciousness

Shruti – literally, ‘what has been heard’; sacred knowledge

Shudra – the servant caste; one of the four varnas or divisions of the caste system in India

Siddha – an adept or perfected person; one who has developed his/her psychic and pranic capacity to the point of mastery

Siddhi – perfection; enhanced pranic and psychic capacity; paranormal or supernormal accomplishment; control of mind and prana; eight supernatural powers obtained by yogis as a result of long practice

Sloka – verse

Somarasa – a divine and intoxicating drink made from the soma plant and used in ancient sacrificial offerings

Sthitaprajna – one whose wisdom is firmly established and who does not waver, is unmoved by the dualities (e.g. pleasure and pain, gain and loss) and is unshakeably established in superconsciousness

Swabhava – one’s own essential nature

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana including mantra, yantra and other esoteric practices

Tapasya – practice of austerity

Tirtha – holy or sacred place, place of pilgrimage

- Upanishads** – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally 108 in number; containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, ‘to sit near and listen’ (to the spiritual teacher)
- Upasaka** – one who does worship
- Upasana** – personalized form of worship
- Vairagya** – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion
- Vaishnavite** – the sect that reveres incarnations of Vishnu as the Supreme Reality
- Vanaprastha ashrama** – traditionally the third stage of life, from the age of 50 to 75 years of age; withdrawal from involvement in wordly life in order to practise sadhana
- Vatsalya** – affection towards one’s offspring; relationship with God as between parent and child
- Vedanta** – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, ‘the last part of the Vedas’; the school of thought based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita)
- Vedas** – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from the Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, *Atharva*, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of mankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5,000 BCE
- Viveka** – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding
- Vritti** – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern; a particular mental state or condition
- Yajna** – sacrifice; yajna has three components: ritual or worship, satsang and unconditional giving
- Yoga** – union; the root is yuj, meaning ‘to join’, ‘to yoke’; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced

personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali

Yogi – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice

Yuga – aeon; an age of the world

Glossary of Names and Places

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother; son of Indra and Kunti; in the *Bhagavad Gita* he received divine revelation from Sri Krishna

Arya Samajist – follower of Arya Samaj, movement interested in establishing vedic customs; founded by Swami Dayananda in 1875

Aurobindo, Sri – (1872–1950) famous yogi; settled in Pondicherry; concerned with the transformative power of yoga on all levels of the human being

Ayodhya – birthplace of Sri Rama

Bharat – brother of Sri Rama; son of King Dasharatha and Kaikeyi

Bhishma – son of Santanu and Ganga; he was known for his wisdom, firmness of resolve and unflinching devotion to God

Brahmaloka – the world of Brahma; also called satya loka

Brahma, Brahman – etymologically, ‘ever expanding, limitless consciousness’; name of Supreme Consciousness or cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; God as creator; monistic concept of Absolute Reality

Buddha – (566–483 BCE) ‘the enlightened one’; commonly referred to as the founder of Buddhism

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Gouranga – (1485–1534) reformer of the Vaishnava faith; one of the contributors of the bhakti movement in India during the Mughal era

- Dasharatha** – king of Ayodhya; father of Sri Rama
- Dhruva** – bhakta famous for his steadfast worship of Narayana; the pole star is named after him
- Draupadi** – wife of the five Pandava brothers, in the *Mahabharata* epic; great devotee of Sri Krishna
- Durga** – Goddess who removes difficulties; wife of Shiva
- Durvasa, Rishi** – sage whose anger has become proverbial
- Dwarika** – the capital of Sri Krishna’s kingdom at the western point of Gujarat
- Eknath** – (1533–1606) renowned saint in Maharashtra and famous for his inspiring *Eknathi Bhagvatha*
- Gandhi, Mahatma** – (1869–1948) Indian national leader who established his country’s freedom through a non-violent revolution
- Gajendra** – elephant king who was rescued from a ferocious crocodile by Vishnu
- Ganesha** – the elephant-headed Hindu deity who is the remover of obstacles
- Ganga** – river Ganges; most sacred river in India
- Gopal** – another name of Krishna
- Gopis** – companions of the young Krishna in Vrindavan
- Guru Nanak** – (1469–1538) founder of Sikhism
- Hanuman** – name of a powerful monkey chief possessing extraordinary strength and powers which he manifested on several critical occasions on behalf of Sri Rama, the Lord of his heart
- Hari** – name of Vishnu, the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the preservation of the universe; Supreme Consciousness
- Indra** – king of the vedic gods, the ruler of heaven; lord of the senses; the mind or the soul; the rain god
- Janaka, King** – father, progenitor; name of a famous king of Videha or Mithila, who was the foster-father of Sita. He was remarkable for his great knowledge, good works and holiness
- Jnandeva, Jnaneshwar** – (1275–1296) Indian saint; author of the classical texts *Jnaneshwari* and *Bharati Deepika*

Kabir, Kabirdas – (1440–1518) poet and mystic, whose teachings blend Hinduism, Sufism and bhakti

Kaikeyi – one of the three wives of King Dasharatha; mother of Bharat

Kailash – sacred mountain in the Himalayas; residence of Shiva and Parvati

Kakabhushundi – he was cursed by his guru, Sage Lomasha, to incarnate as a crow; devotee of Sri Rama and narrator of Sri Rama's story

Kali – primal manifestation of Shakti; wife of Shiva; deity, Divine Mother; destroyer of time, space, object and ignorance

Kalidasa – (speculated 2nd century BCE or 4th to 5th century CE) renowned dramatist and poet of Sanskrit literature; a simple woodcutter he received great wisdom and poetic gifts due to his devotion for Kali

Kamsa, King – king of Mathura; maternal uncle of Sri Krishna

Kashi – see Varanasi

Krishna, Sri – the 'black' or 'dark one'; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*

Kunti – mother of the five Pandavas, wife of Pandu in the *Mahabharata* epic

Kurukshetra – scene of the epic battle recorded in the *Mahabharata*

Lakshman – hero of the epic *Ramayana*; brother of Sri Rama, son of Dasharatha and his wife Sumitra

Lakshmi – goddess of fortune, prosperity and beauty, the consort of Vishnu

Lanka – island residence of Ravana, present-day Sri Lanka

Mahavira – (599–527 BCE) contemporary to Buddha; founder of the Jain religion advocating non-violence, compassion and restraint

Mansoor – (9th century) Muslim fakir; known as the Saint of Baghdad

Markandeya – a rishi devoted to Devi, the Cosmic Shakti

Mathura – name of an ancient town which is the birthplace of Sri Krishna, situated on the right bank of the river Yamuna

Meghanand – son of demon Ravana killed by Lakshman

Mirabai – (1547–1614) princess; Indian poet saint; devotee of Sri Krishna

Namdev – (1270–1350) Indian saint of Maharashtra; devotee of Lord Vitthala; a form of Sri Krishna

Nanda – foster-father of Sri Krishna and husband of Yashoda

Narada, Sage – author of *Narada Bhakti Sutras*; devotee of Vishnu

Narayana – another name of Vishnu

Pandavas – sons of Pandu: Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Sahadev and Nakula; the five brothers who held an inter-family feud against the Kauravas as recorded in the *Mahabharata*

Parashurama – the sixth incarnation of Vishnu

Parvati – goddess and consort of Shiva; mother of Ganesha and Kartikeya

Patanjali, Sage – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; rishi who codified the system of raja yoga

Prahlada – son of demon Hiranyakashipu; great devotee of Vishnu. His faith helped him withstand many trials; Vishnu saved him in the form of Narasimha, half man and half lion

Rabindranath Tagore – (1861–1914) Indian poet and philosopher, founder of Shanti Niketan, West Bengal, which offers a model of high quality education

Radha – beloved gopi of Sri Krishna

Raidas, Ravidas – (15th/16th century) poet-saint; born in Varanasi to a cobbler family; disciple of Kabirdas

Rahim – (born 1557) poet of Mughal emperor Akbar

Rama, Sri – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king

Rama Tirtha – (1873–1906) Indian saint and mathematician

- Ramakrishna, Paramahansa** – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda
- Ramana Maharshi** – (1879–1950) a renowned jnana yogi and enlightened sage who taught mainly through silence; establisher of the path of self-enquiry
- Ramdas, Samarth Ramdas** – (1608–1682) Indian saint, poet and social reformer
- Ravana** – the ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Sita, Sri Rama's wife, and was slain by Sri Rama; his ten heads symbolize attachment to the phenomenal reality
- Sandilya, Sage** – author of *Bhakti Sutras of Sandilya*
- Sati** – wife of Shiva
- Shabari** – tribal woman and devotee of Sri Rama; she waited 60 years for darshan of Sri Rama; symbol of unflinching faith
- Shakti** – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman
- Shankaracharya, Adi** – (782–820) name of a celebrated teacher of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, he was an enlightened sage who is said to have established the Dashnami order of sannyasa and authored a large number of scriptural works
- Shatrughna** – son of King Dasharatha and his wife Sumitra; younger brother of Sri Rama and twin brother of Lakshman
- Sheshnag** – name of a 1000-hooded serpent, represented as forming the couch on which Vishnu reclines, or as supporting the entire universe on his head
- Shishupala** – cousin and adversary of Sri Krishna; killed by Sri Krishna after 100 insults
- Shiva** – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic; original source of yoga; Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality

Sita – daughter of King Janaka and the wife of Sri Rama, as recorded in the epic *Ramayana*

Sugriva – a monkey chief who assisted Sri Rama in his search and recovery of Sita

Sukadeva, Shukadeva – son of Vedavyasa; he narrated the *Bhagavata Purana* to Raja Parikshit

Surdas – (c. 1478–1560) celebrated blind saint and poet of India; his devotional songs to Sri Krishna are known throughout India

Tukaram – (17th century) Indian poet saint of Maharashtra

Tulsidas – (1532–1623) author of one of the versions of the famous epic *Ramayana* called the *Ramacharitamanas*, which describes the life of Sri Rama. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India

Uddhava – devotee of Sri Krishna; a childhood friend of Sri Krishna who later learned bhakti from the gopis

Upamanyu – devotee of Shiva

Vali – monkey chief, who at the behest of his younger brother Sugriva, was slain by Sri Rama

Valmiki – name of a celebrated sage who meditated for so long that he became interred in a termite mound; author of the first *Ramayana*

Varanasi – holy city connected especially with Lord Shiva; also known as Benares and Kashi

Vasudeva – father of Sri Krishna

Vibhishana – youngest brother of demon Ravana; devotee of Sri Rama

Vishnu – vedic deity; the second deity of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), entrusted with the preservation of the universe, a duty which obliges him to appear in several incarnations; Supreme Consciousness

Vishwamitra, Sage – literally, ‘friend of the universe’; a celebrated sage during the time of Sri Rama

Vrindavan – name of a forest near Gokula where Sri Krishna used to play as a child

Vritrasur – mythological figure; practised intense tapasya and devotion to Vishnu

Yama – Lord of death

Yamuna – a sacred river near Vrindavan

Yashoda – foster mother of Sri Krishna; wife of Nanda

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